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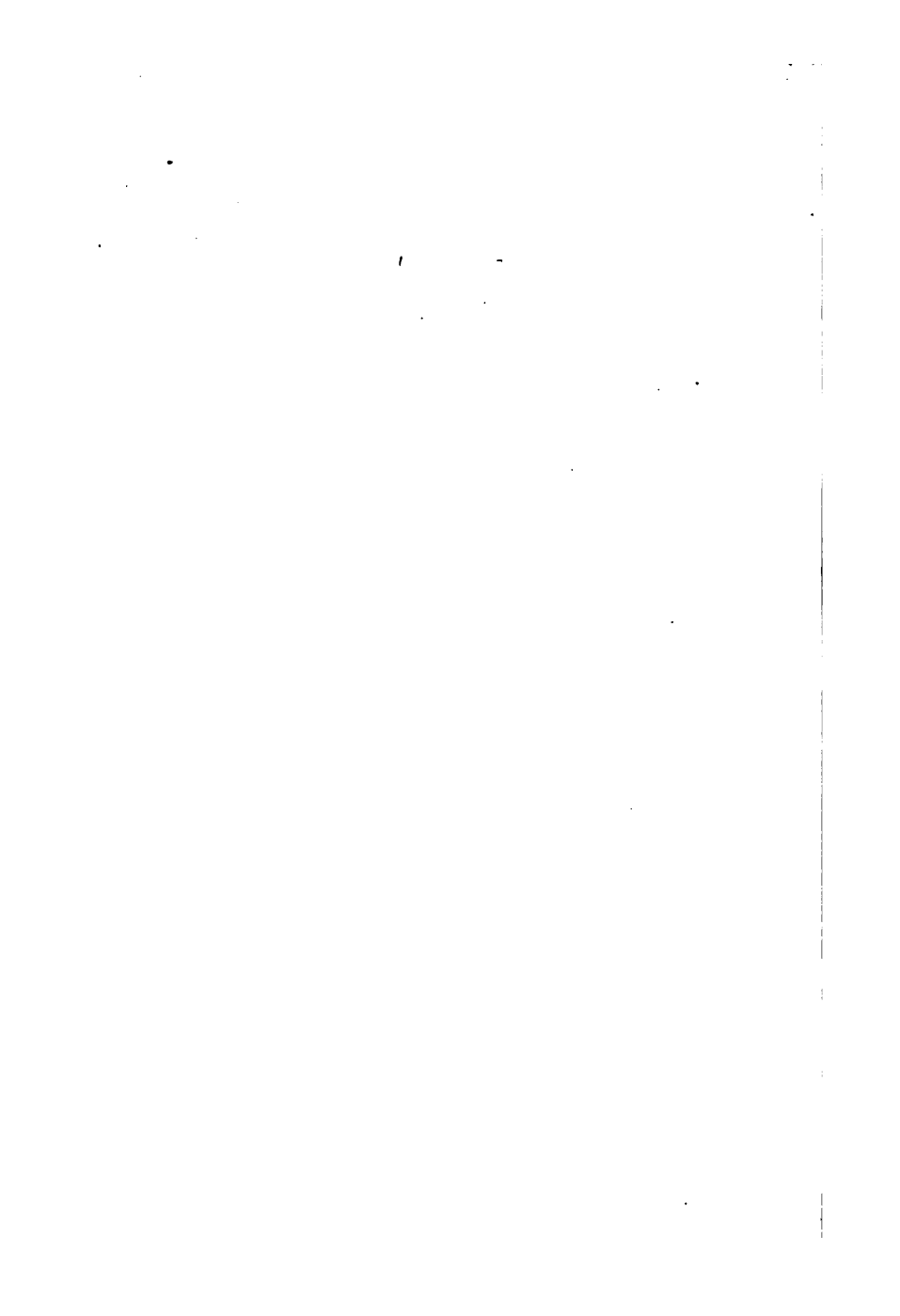
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A Sawdust Doll



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A
Sawdust Doll

by

Mrs. Reginald de Koven



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Chapter I.

BRADFORD," said General Rivington to the old servant who was standing behind his chair, "it is chilly. You may light the fire."

It was nine o'clock, the habitual breakfast hour in this house, in Washington Square, which had been General Rivington's home for sixty years. The table at which he sat had never been set for more than two, but had always stood in lonely dignity in the midst of the panelled dining-room covered with the same spotless damask, the same silver, old English and polished to an irreproachable whiteness, which he remembered as a child. Those long past years seemed to linger in the room; seemed to speak to him sometimes in the familiar hum of the tea-

kettle. He could see himself as a child sitting silently opposite, his eyes dwelling upon the gray head of his father bent over his newspaper, or wandering upward and beyond to the girlish face of his mother, known only thus in her portrait which had already taken its place among the score of silent faces which filled the walls; but for many years he had occupied his father's chair, and for years the two portraits of his father and mother had hung side by side on the oak panelling above the fireplace—that of his father done late in life with his gray hair, high aquiline nose, his head stiffly borne in its stock, his jurist's hand upon a law-book—beside the slender lady with her velvet gown and sloping shoulders, her ringlets and her pearls, whose plaintive grace and old time elegance spoke of an earlier day.

Alexander Rivington had inherited the aquiline sternness of his father's

features, but a different expression was imparted to them by the mobile brilliancy of his dark eyes and the modish arrangement of his gray hair which curled upon the temples and was cut, with a fantastic suggestion of old time coquetry, straight across the brow. The military bearing of his tall figure, still slight and perfectly erect, completed the impression of a distinguished man, whom fortune had made an arbiter of fashion and pride had made a soldier. The hand which held the newspaper was scrupulously kept, of a smooth, long-fingered type, showing both taste and distinction, but it was full veined and a little tremulous. His brows were drawn together over the eyes which scanned the paper, he moved impatiently and looked often at the door.

The dishes remained covered and the tea-kettle boiled imperiously. General Rivington gave a sigh of irritation and laying down his paper began to turn

over the letters which had been placed beside his plate,

The door opened and a young woman entered with a graceful, rapid step, trailing her white garments behind her, her small heels clicking on the wooden floor.

"I am so sorry I am late," she said as she took her seat. "Why have you waited for me?"

"My dear," replied her husband, with a marked air of formality, "I should never think of beginning without you."

She sighed, and putting up a white hand leaned her head languidly upon it, stifling a yawn. The invariable breakfast hour was one of the few unchangeable rules in this house, whose mistress she had been for ten years, and one of the few exactions which her husband's indulgence imposed upon her. But sometimes it was an effort; she had danced until four o'clock. "This morn-

ing, surely," she thought to herself, "it is really good of me to be down."

There was silence for a moment, while the servants served the breakfast, and General Rivington surveyed his wife's bent head, noting the blue tinge about the eyes, the pallor of her small dark face.

"How was your ball?" he asked. "You look a trifle pale. I am not sorry it is the last."

"No, nor I," she replied, looking up from her plate with a glance of languid acquiescence. "Really they are hardly worth the trouble."

"Rather a painful duty, I always considered them," said her husband. "One I am very glad to leave you to—but I thought they amused you. You went with the Lindsays, didn't you?"

"Yes, Kate would not take no for an answer—said she had supper all arranged for, and besides I had promised Tom Cary the cotillion ever since the

beginning of the season. It was pretty enough."

The annoyance had quite faded from General Rivington's face. He drank his coffee leisurely and looked frequently at his wife. Ten years had passed since their marriage but her arresting personality had still for him the charm of mystery not quite revealed. It was a difficult task for anyone who knew her to think of anything else when she was near. If he had been a younger man he would have suffered as well as loved her; with thirty years between them, his affection for his young wife had become less jealous than indulgent. He realized that the obedience she showed him was of her own loyalty and not of compulsion. He was grateful for the tact which permitted him to continue unhindered a life crystallized into cherished habits for years before he knew her, and in return urged upon her a like liberty of taste and found a con-

stant pleasure in a careful and gallant consideration of her wishes.

She never tired but always charmed him. His eyes rested lovingly on her now. She was dressed in a loose white gown, with dark fur at throat and hem, an ancient girdle confining its heavy folds. She sat a little turned from the table, her head resting languidly against the high, carved back of the chair, her small feet crossed upon a foot-stool, her dress falling from her slight waist over her knee and amply to the floor in folds which defined and suggested the slender roundness of her tall figure. She had eaten little and rapidly, her hands moving with a dainty and vigorous precision, and then she had assumed this attitude of relaxation. Her eyes became absent and absorbed ; they were dark, deep-set under their straight brows, dreamy now, with their habitual look of brooding abstraction, but they could be keen, observing, sometimes

even sarcastic. Her hair grew low in a lovely untormented curve, parted simply and drawn back into a knot at the neck in the rapid toilet of the morning. Her face was small and pale, her features firmly cut and delicate. The expression of her mouth in repose was sad sometimes even to sternness, but her eyes rarely lost their mysterious look of vague abstraction. She gave an impression of a power not quite conscious of itself, of an unfocused image in a lense. Her voice alone, deep and slow, of an individual and haunting quality, seemed to express if it failed to define her. Her enemies called her cruel. Those who loved her found her cold. She was discontented enough this morning. The ball had not amused her—nothing had, for so long a time that she was afraid of confessing it even to herself.

“Is there anything I can do for you to-day?” asked her husband, rising and coming towards her.

"No, nothing," she replied, "except perhaps you might ask some men for the opera to night."

"Certainly, my dear. How many do you want?"

"Two, I think. I do not care much who. The music will rest me. I shall ask some woman." She stopped a moment and then looking up quickly into her husband's face, "You won't go yourself?" she asked.

"You really wish it?" he said reluctantly, thinking of his club and his whist.

"Oh, no," she replied quickly, recognizing the significance of his tone. "Certainly not, my dear. It is Faust again. You have heard it so often!"

There was a little pause. Many such conversations had passed without comment. This morning she rose, and taking his hand with a pretty gesture of affection, looked up into her husband's face.

"I am sorry—do you know, dear, you leave me much to myself?"

He raised her hand gallantly to his lips. "Why not?" he replied. "What I see I love. What I don't see I can trust."

She looked at him a moment in silence. "You are far too good to me," she said.

"No, my dear. You are the most reasonable, as well as the most beautiful woman of my acquaintance."

"Will you drive this afternoon?" she continued, smiling, her clear gaze still fixed upon his face.

"With the greatest pleasure," he replied,—“but no! I must beg to be excused. There is a sale of old prints at Bangs to-day. I may find the Moliere I have wanted so long. To-morrow, my love, I shall be at your service."

"Of course," she said, "Don't think of it then." Her hand had been resting upon his shoulder as she had made her

last request, she dropped it now, but with no expression of annoyance and watched him as he gathered up his papers and left the room. Then her face fell and she sighed—a sigh which was not quite all disappointment, not quite all relief;—she took up her own letters, and sinking in a low chair by the fire began to read them.

Some with foreign stamps she laid aside with a slight smile, raised her eyebrows over the number of invitations, and stopped short, to examine carefully an unfamiliar hand-writing on another, the last of the pile, which she finally opened and began to read :

MY DEAR MRS. RIVINGTON :

Unless I am quite mistaken, I saw you last night at the Opera. If you will permit me, I should like above all things to come and see you. It is more than a dozen years since we met, and I seem to myself very bold in making this request, but in so doing I shield myself behind an acquaintance dating almost from our childhood.

Most of the years since then have been spent away from home, and I find, quite naturally perhaps, that I am a stranger in my native land. If you knew how much pleasure this glimpse of you has given me, you would forgive me that I thus tempt fate in asking if you will receive me.

Very sincerely yours,

PHILIP AYTOUN.

The brilliant smile with which Mrs. Rivington read this short letter—a smile natural and childish which illumined her face—had stolen into her eyes by the time she had re-read it and folded it back into its envelope. She rose with a quick movement from the chair, dropping her other letters unheedingly on the floor, and with one foot on the fender, her small hands held to the blaze, looked out with shining eyes upon the cloudy sky, forgetting the present moment in the retrospect which the letter brought before her.

“Philip Aytoun,” she murmured to

herself, "in this country! It will be charming to see him again. I wonder what he will be like." Her mind repossessed its memories rapidly. They returned to her now clear and distinct, and the friend of her childhood appeared before her mental vision with his eager boyish face and the strange beauty which had been woven into her early dreams.

"He will be changed, of course," she reflected, "but I hope not spoiled. What a sensitive, shy creature he was! full of promise, but no one could have predicted he would go so far!"

"Philip Aytoun," she repeated the name again, dwelling upon it with a thrill of pleasure, made up partly of wonder that the name of her boyish friend should now be that of a famous painter, and partly of pride, that he had not forgotten her.

A little later during the hour, which according to her custom she usually

spent at her desk, she had replied to the letter—

“Come to see me Sunday,” she had written first, “when I am always at home.” Then she had written another note appointing an hour when he might see her alone. “He will not like to meet others here,” she reflected. “It might spoil a pretty moment.”

During her drive in the afternoon her thoughts again reverted to the letter. She recalled broken fragments of sentences, and tones of his voice. One little scene she remembered distinctly—three young lads walking among the autumn leaves which had fallen by the road-side, and he, the hero of her childish fancy, turning away his head, and refusing to recognize her, as she drove by in her phaeton. Beautiful, sought after, admired, hated and discussed as she was by the world, whose ways she had learned to know so well, Mrs. Rivington remembered with a little thrill the

moment of bitterness and chagrin she felt that day, the slight to her child's pride. The rustle of the leaves, the boy's averted face came back to her with sense of vivid reality. She remembered, too, the tardy and reluctant explanation which followed, how the others had rallied him on his fancy for her and challenged him to pass her by unnoticed, and how this little shock to a fancy which with her was fleeting and light as the thistle-down of the fields, was followed by other childish quarrels and misunderstandings, and finally forgotten in other caprices of her girlhood. Yet his individuality among all the students of the academy which made the life of the quiet village in which she spent her youth stood out with great distinctness,—his sensitiveness, his innate refinement, his untamable shyness and self-consciousness. Thus recalling him, her thoughts were caught again by an insistent detail of her present life,

and the letter and its author were for the time dismissed.

Helen Rivington was beautiful, intelligent ; but she was also indolent, lonely, and as a natural consequence unhappy. This she did not confess to herself, blindfolded as was her mental vision by the luxury of her material surroundings. Her outer life was full of movement variety and the sound of cymbals. She knew the odor of incense, and her path was strewn with flowers, but she trod it in a solitude of soul, which deserved a pity it never received. Her mind was rare, and her soul a garden; but she was romantic, given over to reveries and the idleness of dreams. For years she had lived a life of outward gayety, of inner loneliness, productive of neither interest or joy, but this prolonged inactivity had become retributive, and endurance was merging into pain. Like a ship whose engines were asleep, she had floated with no sign of struggle; but now the stir-

rings of a new and insistent vitality disturbed her long repose. Her nature had never expressed itself. This, under the existing circumstances, was as strange and anomalous as a truth is apt to be. The recognition of this fact she had long held in banishment. In revenge it now monopolized her horizon. She became preoccupied with herself, and forgot to look without. She was far too intelligent to be mildly bored, which condition, optimistically defined as content, represents that measure of happiness which resignation teaches hope.

Her girlhood had been passed in the country near New York, where she had been carefully taught by a succession of governesses whose ministrations were succeeded by private instructions from tutors of the neighboring academy. Her clear and vigorous mind responded with enthusiasm to the intellectual training she received, and the continuous life in the pure country air furnished her

with an equally advantageous physical surrounding.

At nineteen her face suggested to the uncomplex mind of her many and abject adorers rhymes of flowers and bowers, and to the reflective a wondering query as to the origin of an alluring exotic personality which defied them to forget her. There are some characters which can never be reduced to an equation, some natures which bear only the suggested explanation of a metaphor. Helen's was one of these. Her eyes dreamed of mirages, but her lips were prophetic of martyrdoms. If her soul had matched the pure line of her brow, she would not have needed the discipline of this world. She was slight as a girl, and her weight had never varied. Nature for once having made a perfect work had apparently decided to leave it unmolested, and had begged indulgence of the destroyer Time.

At eighteen vagrant fancy had led Helen to an oblique place, where she experienced a slight fall and a considerable shock. She decided that love was over, when she had not learned to spell the name.

At this juncture, her father's fortune, the result of many years of audacious dealings in Wall Street, suddenly rolled away like a mist, and her father himself died a week after in the physical collapse which followed his failure. From him she had inherited a pliable and vigorous intelligence and a temperament whose influence upon others was electric, whose future was unprophesiable. From her mother she had inherited an ineradicable Puritanism, unsuspected and as yet held in solution in a nature which no test of Fate had ever analyzed. A stern intellectuality had indeed widened the mental horizon of the original Puritan, but had not restricted her mother's capacity for suffering,

which was indeed a talent only undeveloped by the adverse conditions which extreme prosperity had imposed upon it. Her influence over her only child was as uncomprehending as it was strenuous and affectionate; loving Helen devotedly, she succeeded in making her thoroughly unhappy. Obedient at first to the exacting training which her mother's ambition imposed upon her, Helen became moody, inclined to solitude and secrecy, and finally after some years of painful friction took possession of her own developed and original nature, which eluded the influence of her mother's character, quite as much as it differed from it. But the loneliness and pain incident upon so seriously alien an environment had tinged her mind with melancholy and her bitter experience of the false idol of her youth, as interpreted by the morbid romanticism of a mind quite without perspective and wholly dedicated to introspection, led

her to abandon the idea of living a life guided by her own preference. She accepted an attitude of resignation and abandoned hope, the prerogative of her years.

At twenty she still retained the impression that she could never love again, and when bitter grief at the death of her father crushed her and misfortune faced her, she married Alexander Rivington, not unwillingly, but with a resignation which bordered on content.

He did not ask her love, and she conceived herself amply justified in the darkness of her young despair in her acceptance of a life whose possibilities inspired respect, at the hands of a man whose personality commanded admiration if not affection; more than that he had been her father's life-long friend. She felt that he would have approved.

At fifty Alexander Rivington might have inspired sentiment if he had not himself been content with admiration.

The unbroken prosperity of his life had crystallized the springs of feeling; thus he had been influenced by the conditions of his birth and period, and had become representative rather than individual. He was conservative, formal and intensely proud; an autocrat whose selfishness wore the mask of courtesy. Coming early into the possession of a very large fortune, he had put his leisure to excellent use, and had evinced during twenty-five years no inclination to give up his liberty. His fortune had not deprived him of ambition, which was early satisfied by an honorable and in some respects a brilliant record in the war of the Rebellion. His excellent birth and very keen mind had furnished him with an inherited gallantry of manner and many cultivated tastes. His house was filled with the collections of years of travel, and his mind with recollections of the distinguished men who had been his friends and companions.

His tall figure with his gray hair, ruddy skin and keen dark eyes was a familiar sight upon the avenue, and he was still quoted as the most representative type of the manners which distinguished old New York.

But for many years his life had fallen into narrow lines. He was oftener at his club in his favorite corner among his friends, than at the Opera. With women his manner was gay, complimentary, and a little fantastic. His memory was faultless, his experiences not a few. He still dined out very frequently, and his own dinners were famous for their excellent wines, their carefully selected company, and their gayety, for which he always set the pace. His intimates were few, and were among the men whom he had known from boyhood. His wife's father, James Lawrence, was one of these, the best loved, perhaps the nearest friend. They had been at college together, and

were nearly connected by the innumerable ties and recollections of lives passed almost side by side during a period of more than thirty years. When ruin and death fell suddenly upon Helen's father, General Rivington was the one who was appealed to for help and advice in the double and irremediable disaster, and in a moment of sympathy for the beautiful girl he had known from childhood, and whom he found in the first despair over the death of her father and face to face with misfortune, he lost the composure he had prized so long and offered her gallantly the remainder of his life, his love, and his protection. When after a day or two of reflection, Helen shyly and gratefully accepted him, he realized that his joy in this new possession was by no means unselfish, and accepted with delight the change in his life, which he had long believed to be impossible.

The astonishment with which the an-

nouncement of his marriage was received at his club was soon changed to envy when Helen had once been seen, and had taken the place which her husband's position gave to her youth and beauty, and which she filled with a simple dignity which was a continual pleasure to him. Thus with no transition time between lessons and marriage, Helen found herself one of a very powerful and luxury-loving society, whose prizes and prerogatives were laid within her hands. She enjoyed it all for a time, the ease, the continual variety which was at first amusement, and her own unquestioned place; but the novelty of a gift is less enduring than the pride of acquisition, and the well-being which is as easily gained as was hers, becomes too soon an unnoticed condition. It was a long time, however, before her unhappiness became articulate. Her disposition was eminently amiable, she was submissive of circumstances with a resignation be-

yond her years. Her intelligence apprehended the profound sadness of life, and her early experience taught her the futility of struggle and the folly of the attempt to dictate Fate. But if her temperament was obedient, her mind was not. Intellectual curiosity had led her in many wandering ways, and although her memories were astonishingly few, and she had learned but little of life, she had come to the conclusion that the only moments which are worth remembering are those in which we have forgotten ourselves. But with a fastidious mind, and an unpromising and conventional environment, the possibility of self-forgetfulness seemed to her daily as elusive as it was alluring. Her experience with the type of unenlightened heathen, who do not know how to spell sentiment and who cry out loudly for food, had not in any way encouraged her. It had brought her invariable disappointment and forced her

to be cruel. She did not like the use of the knife, nor fancy herself in the defensive attitude.

Thus life had passed her by. At thirty she was young in living, and untouched by time. Her beauty was still in its unmarred perfection—a promise of joy—evocative of dreams.

Chapter II.

MRS. Rivington's drawing-room was charming, and very characteristic of her. It was not over-crowded with furniture, but was warm and comforting and shadowy. Near the fireplace was a low sofa with a high carved back, a table with a lamp stood near at hand, in a corner was a low divan heaped with pillows and protected by a screen. Near by was a table covered with yellow French books, and the month's magazines. Over other tables were scattered an infinite variety of photographs, small and great, and above the mantel was a very remarkable collection of blue china. A portrait of Mrs. Rivington by Carolus Duran hung against a tapestry. On the day when Aytoun was expected the room was full of flow-

ers, which had just come in from the country. It was a warm day in early spring, and, the windows being open, a fragrant little breeze blew in through the azalea blooms and moved the curtains. Mrs. Rivington had just returned from her drive and was seated, a little fatigued with the first warmth of the spring day, on a sofa with her back to the light, when Aytoun was announced.

She half rose from her seat to give him a warmer greeting than was her wont. He had quite altered; not only in all that the development from boy to man would necessitate, but he had also changed in type. Helen would not have recognized her childhood's friend in the tall and strikingly original figure she saw before her. The boy's smooth face she remembered with its closely cropped hair, its unmarked features, and its mobile mouth, had developed into an admirable and noble type of beauty, poetic and virile. The reddish brown

hair was cut close on the neck, but waved thickly over his forehead. A small mustache shaded a mouth full but firmly curved. A vertical line between the straight brows showed the habit of concentration, and in the slight hollowness of the cheeks she saw the unsparing use of the mental qualities. The eyes alone, of a luminous blue, remained as Helen remembered them, clear and young with an expression of singular freshness and charm. The rounded ideality of the chin and throat gave an almost feminine grace to the head.

He entered the room with a slight air of embarrassment, charming in its simplicity. The sensitiveness of old was recalled to Helen by his voice, which had many notes in it musical and unconventional. His English was a little stilted as if from disuse. There is a distinction which comes from within, another from without. Aytoun's was

the first. As it happened, he was perfectly dressed, but Mrs. Rivington forgot to notice it. She motioned him to a chair beside her.

"How charming of you to have written me!"

"More charming of you to have given me so prompt a pardon for my indiscretion—I hardly knew—"

She interrupted him—"Not know what a real pleasure it is to see you again after all these years?"

"I am only too glad to be reassured," he answered.

She looked intently at him, searching for her recollection of him, verifying the survivals, noting the changes. She found herself genuinely interested and amused; her eyes as she looked at him were bright with pleasure.

"How could you doubt it?" she asked him. "Did you think I should be changed?"

He faltered a moment.

"I thought (leaning forward in his chair), that I might—find you—spoiled."

"Ah! I hope not! but I must have changed."

"Yes, you have changed, but not as I feared. You are quite fresh, quite natural. You are," pausing, "even more than I could have expected."

She scanned him attentively from under her white lids, and found his hesitating words exquisitely flattering.

"I," she replied, "I am nothing. Tell me about yourself. It is worth while, your life. You have worked so hard, done so much. Tell me all about it."

"Not now," he said, "some day you shall know all you like about me. But now tell me, do you remember the day we went to the old pond, near the wood, to skate?"

"Oh, yes," she replied, laughing; "of course I do."

"Do you remember your setting your

foot in the print of mine in the snow, and laughing at the difference in size? Do you remember the day I drew you home on your sled? Do you remember the little cipher letter you sent me?" He paused a moment. "No, I see you don't. Never mind, I have it yet, and your photograph with the inscription, 'always your friend, Helen.'"

"And do you remember the day you refused to recognize me?" she asked him, laughingly. "No; that you have forgotten, but I have not. It hurts yet. How dared you?"

"That was just the trouble," he replied; "I did not dare. You frightened me. You do now. How mysterious you are. How beautiful." The last word dropped from his lips almost inaudibly, and his eyes narrowed imperceptibly with the artist's instinct as he watched her, sitting there in the half light, bending her head and listening to him.

"How long ago it is!" she exclaimed. "We will keep it a secret, will we not? It is quite fifteen years—did you know it—since I first knew you?"

His embarrassment had quite disappeared. He seemed to have forgotten himself in the charm of her presence.

"Yes, fifteen, and I said you had changed. I was wrong. Now that I see you and hear you speak, you seem just the same. Your expression; yes, that alone has changed. Something has come into your face, and something has gone. I can't quite express it."

"You," she exclaimed, "have changed. I am preserved perhaps, but you have developed. I have done nothing; you have earned the change I see in you. It is not for the worse, believe me."

Aytoun flushed a little at this, and his self-consciousness returned. There was a little irremediable pause. He rose to go.

"May I come again?" he asked.

"If you only will." She watched him as he rose. At the door he turned impulsively.

"Do let me come," he said; "I feel like a boy again. How good it is to see you!"

Chapter III.

 SEVERAL days slipped by before Mrs. Rivington realized that Aytoun had made no sign, no effort to see her again. But nearly a fortnight passed before the unconfessed pique, which had been sharpening the edge of her curiosity, drove her to visit the collection of his pictures then on view at an uptown gallery.

The spring had suddenly declared itself, and hung its pennons triumphantly from the branches in Madison Square. Above them rose the creamy tower of the garden. Life, multiform, electric, was rolling by in the Avenue, but the hurry and stress of the laboring city seemed somehow less strenuous. The stream of humanity which surges and divides at the corner of Twenty-

third street was dotted with flowers. The women carried them in their hands, the men in their coats. If one listened carefully, one could hear above the rattle of the cars and carriages the twitter of the birds in the park. A faint fragrance floated in the air. Spring had invaded the town.

As Helen drove by in her carriage she was conscious of a distinct pleasure in the air, the motion. She was glad she was alive. A delicate pink flush stained her cheek, her hair under the large hat she wore blew back from her brow, her ideas floated too. She was glad to feel young, with a gladness which the knowledge of her thirty years rather emphasized than diminished. She remembered when she had not appreciated her youth, and atoned for that scant courtesy with an ample gratitude for its gracious lingering. As she drove up the avenue she abandoned herself to the happiness which floated in the mild

atmosphere, the consciousness of coming summer, and the content of her own beauty, latent and comforting, which she neither diminished by over-consciousness, nor cheapened by neglect.

The curiosity which took her to see Aytoun's pictures was only sharpened by his apparent forgetfulness of her, not embittered. She was in fact rather pleased than otherwise. "He is not changed," she mused. "This is the same boy who refused to recognize me that autumn day and who will not bear the touch of the whip. No driving here, no tyrannies—but he has not forgotten me."

The carriage stopped at the door of the gallery and Helen went up its marble steps. Within it was cool and silent. She went immediately to the room which contained the collection of Aytoun's pictures. It was not a regular exhibition day, but there were a number of people there, examining them

carefully. A group of eager girls, art-students evidently by their dress, were standing before one of his portraits, that of a girl, pointing out to each other with a mixture of envy and admiration the looseness but brilliancy of the technique. The face was not beautiful, but the cool gaze of the gray eyes, the hair loosely combed back, the suggestion of ancient costume in the dress, the alert intellectual interest in the face, riveted the attention with a daring sarcastic command, most characteristic of the painter. Before another, a landscape with a predominant sky, full of moving clouds and some wind-swept hills, a couple of men were standing. One of them, a bearded man with deeply-marked features, and a fatigued look about the eyes, was talking of the picture in the artist vernacular. Helen caught a few words as she passed them.

A pretty woman, in gray, with violets in her bonnet, and very red lips, was

nervously poking the tip of a smart shoe with her parasol, her eyes cast down; the man beside her was talking earnestly to her with a triumphant smile. He turned as Helen passed them, and she recognized a man who had sat next to her at dinner the night before, and whose flowers had filled her rooms all winter. His face fell, and he instantly stopped talking. The woman looked up and stared at Helen, who crossed immediately to the other side of the gallery. Her lip curled a little.

The beauty of the pictures began to absorb her mind, which possessed a far keener and more correct instinct for what was good in art than she had ever given herself credit for. The presence of the pictures penetrated and stimulated her mind, and she began to feel a keen envy for the talent and the will which had so triumphantly expressed themselves.

She turned and walked to the door

to buy a catalogue, when she saw Aytoun standing at the entrance of the gallery with some men and talking earnestly. Helen was impressed by the suggestion of power and exhilaration in his manner, and the pose of his head. Noting the graceful movements of his hands, she watched him for a moment in silence. He was standing before one of his pictures, evidently explaining it.

"Well he may be proud!" she said to herself. "I shall tell him so."

He looked up quickly and caught sight of her. Excusing himself from his companions, he came towards her gallantly, hat in hand, bending low, with a little French exaggeration of manner, which became him well.

"How good of you to come and see my pictures," he said. "I am infinitely honored."

He has learned other arts in Paris than that of painting, she observed quickly, while she replied :

"Why good? grateful, perhaps," she looked around the room. "Come, tell me about your pictures. When did you do this one, I have just been looking at? Which do you like best yourself?"

"Would you really like to know?"

"Oh, so much."

She was interested. It was a collection of pictures of which youth might be proud and age content.

He began to speak of them; simply, and without affectation. She was charmed with the careful explanations which he gave, flattered with the compliment at being addressed as an equal. He was clear, direct and modest, revealing with almost unconscious significance the distance she had traveled in his art, with a word sometimes disclosing where he stood so far beyond her.

Reason had never taught Helen how to listen. That knowledge was a cradle gift. "Helen," her mother had said to her one day while she loitered over

a page of Latin, "why don't you learn your lessons? Do you want to be an ignoramus when you grow up?" "Mamma!" she had replied, bravely, lifting her appealing brown eyes, "I have never found the man, woman or child yet, I could not talk to, and I don't think I should do any better, if I knew the whole of Julius Cæsar."

She had learned the lesson, notwithstanding, and many others, but none so valuable as one she never learned but always practiced, that to most men no intellectual pleasure equals the pure delight of teaching a pretty woman what they think she ought to know. Helen was receiving in very full measure the reward for her obedience to this golden rule of life, for in response to the encouragement of her manner, her lifted, sympathetic eyes, Aytoun was expressing, as he rarely had before, his thoughts, his hopes, his experiences in the art to which he devoted his life.

She asked him when he had left America, and when he had begun to paint. There was a long gap to fill up between the time when still a lad he had disappeared from her life, and the present. He told of the years in Paris, years of discouragement while he continued to paint in the manner of his masters, his groping experiments, and finally the discovery of his own individual manner, and the astonishingly quick reward which followed.

"No, it is not easy," he said, "learning the *métier*, and it is harder still for many who have had the perseverance to learn it and learn it well, to realize that after all the manner is nothing. When we have advanced one step further and have found out something important to say, we of the nineteenth century will say it better than it has been said before ; but just now it is very discouraging—the older men are terribly *démodés*, and many of the younger ones seem to

have forgotten that there is a *métier* to learn. They would have us believe that individuality is the one essential, and seek above all things to be eccentric. For this they discard everything, nature first of all, and paint women, trees, houses, beasts, and the sea, green, blue, and purple, as their mood dictates—anything is legitimate, so that they may be pronounced ‘clever,’ and that they may declare their picture has been done between eleven o’clock and noon.”

The art students had disappeared, the pretty woman in the gray dress and her companion had long since departed, the rooms were nearly empty and very still, but the daylight still lingered and Helen had forgotten it was growing late. She stopped before a picture of a little seaport, drowned in a brown and melancholy mist.

“What is that?” she asked.

“Oh! a little scene in the South.”

“How sad!” she exclaimed, “how

despairing. What expression inanimate things can have!"

"It was myself, I think."

"Ah," she said, giving him the catalogue, "show me what you have called it."

"Oh, nothing. A sea-port."

"It is not well named; you should call it 'Spleen.' Baudelaire would have painted thus."

"Oh, yes, of course," he laughed delightedly, "I should. I shall call it that in the next exhibition."

He watched her as she looked at the pictures and noted the beautiful proportion of her slight figure, the length from the knee down, the slender waist and hips, the flowing line from throat to wrist. She was dressed in black, of a soft material which fell gracefully in heavy folds. She wore a short cape of prune velvet with some white lace about it, a large hat of black shaded her eyes and threw out the fine line of her pro-

file, the heavy wave of her dark hair. Aytoun noticed all this, even to the slight gold chain with its watch and trinkets which fastened at her waist and the jewel in the handle of her parasol. She had quite forgotten herself, and Aytoun could see how natural was the proud, the almost insolent lift, of her small head, and he forgave her as his eyes watched the sensitive ripples of expression about her mouth, a mouth which was far too womanly to be cruel. He had ceased to look for the girl, the almost child, he had remembered, or to listen for the recollected sound of her voice. He was pleased, aroused and even disturbed at this woman, whose life had been so different from anything he had experienced or seen, and yet, with a beauty which satisfied his eyes, and stirred his laggard pulses, both understood and stimulated his mind. "How complex she is," he thought to himself, "I cannot understand her." He turned

away his head, averted his eyes, and listened to her voice.

"How versatile you are!" she was saying, "how versatile! Portraits there, landscapes here, and this picture. Why, you are a musician, too! There is vibration all through it, like the continued sound of a violin, and this, what a strange picture! What does it mean? Those shadowy trees, that strange sign upon the pool which strikes upon the dark as sound upon silence. It is a sound! That man in the boat is listening! What is it? Tell me quickly! A bell? No! it is higher, clearer. Oh! a bird—a bird! in the night." She turned towards him excitedly.

Aytoun handed her the catalogue.

"The Song of the Nightingale," he said, simply looking at her with a quick drawn breath.

Helen met his glance a moment and turned away, feeling her heart beat.

The artistic sympathy is terribly dan-

gerous, that of the body flares and wanes quickly, this takes fire at the top. It is a draft of pure alcohol, white, clear, and intoxicating, and ignites the soul.

Helen felt like one dumb, who suddenly is given voice, like one who finds the long sought arrow to a bow, but not for long. The moment was too vivid, and her outer self resumed control.

She looked at her watch.

"It is very late," she exclaimed, "I must go."

He put her in her carriage and she thanked him gracefully for his kindness in showing her his pictures, but her courtesy was a little formal, and he remembered suddenly how as a girl he had often found her cold.

Chapter IV.

AYTOUN watched Mrs. Rivington's carriage as it turned the corner of Fifty-seventh street to drive down the avenue, and then he lighted a cigarette and took his way leisurely along Broadway, following its slanting thoroughfare to the rooms he had taken in the middle of the town. He had not quite recovered from the blow which the rush and hurry of American life had inflicted upon him, exile as he had been so long from his own country.

The dirt of the streets, the bewildering rush of the cars, and the hurrying press of vehicles still disturbed his nerves, which were sensitive to every impression. The restless discontent upon the faces of the people, the lack of the simple human happiness, so often

seen among the laborers of the older countries as they go about their work, impressed him with a feeling of perplexity and sadness.

"*A quoi bon?*" he asked himself a dozen times a day.

This afternoon his mood was happier; he was proud of the ample recognition which his countrymen had given him, and melted into a mild content by the persuasive warmth of the spring day. As he walked along he noticed, with pleasure, the groups of children playing in front of the shops, in the warmth of the lingering daylight. Two little girls with wheat-like yellow braids and rosy German cheeks were dancing to the music of a one-legged violinist, who stood at the corner of the street. Aytoun dropped a coin into the battered hat, which was offered to him as he passed by. The man thanked him in a round French patois, which sounded good in his ears.

"You are from Concarneau?" he said.

"Oui, monsieur," answered the man with a broad smile.

Aytoun had painted there one summer with a lot of men and recognized the dialect of Brittany.

It all came back to him—his life that summer on the barren coast, its little villages sunk in the hollows of the rocks, the cliff walk by the sea, the gigantic crucifixes with their blackened, death-like figures. As he picked his way among the crowd of passers-by he could almost smell the sea-weed, and his sight was filled with visions of the tall peasant women in their old-time caps, and the bronzed Breton fishermen. He stopped at a corner; a cable car with its evening load of tired humanity on its homeward way dashed by him with an ominous clang. His thoughts returned with a start to New York and Broadway. He asked himself for the hun-

dreadth time why he had come and promised himself a speedy return; and then he called himself ungrateful for the welcome he had received in his own country, and he thought of the sale of his pictures, and the invitations which had already begun to find their way to his rooms.

He had never loved the excitement which comes from association with varying types of people; his mind was distracted and depressed rather than stimulated by such contact. He was quite free from any restraint among his confrères, to whom he was a loyal friend and with whom he spent hours of enthusiastic discourse about their common art. It had always been a theory of his, warmly discussed and religiously practiced, to make a life of art rather than an art of life. The easy associations of his student life harmonized with this intention, furnishing a stimulating atmosphere and distractions

easily assumed and as easily discarded. The more exacting relations of the world he shunned.

Philip Aytoun was the son of a New England clergyman. The stock from which he sprang was purely English, the traditions and trainings of his boyhood severe and confining.

He did not remember his mother, but the hours of loneliness which he spent in looking at her picture and longing for some affection warmer and more caressing than it was possible for his stern father to bestow, were the most poignant recollections of his childhood. His father rarely spoke to him of his mother, and he did not realize that it was from her that he inherited the sensitiveness and love of beauty, which, in her case, had not survived the unhappiness of repression.

Aytoun blamed this sensitive and lonely childhood for the shyness which still tormented him long after he had

been set free to follow his own ambitions.

This natural shyness was further increased by the inherent modesty of a life given up to labor, and a constant and humble comparison of himself with the highest standards of that art to which he was dedicated. If anyone had told Aytoun that his instincts were those of a transferred or translated Puritanism, he would have laughed him to scorn. But it was true. The vigorous will which had so directly brought him into the harbor of success, was born of an invincible sense of responsibility, the direct inheritance of his American blood. The passion for beauty which from early boyhood had sent him wandering among the fields, a companion of the birds and streams, was a single exotic gift, alienating him from his father to whom dreams were but idleness, and separating him from his natural associates.

When, after a few years of reluctant

obedience to his father's rule, his death released him, Philip went straight to Paris. Aytoun was not a painter by profession, he was a poet who painted.

He was too manly to take account of his beauty, which, growing into its perfection with the fine development of his nature, revealed him to his associates. He was too bound by the intense activity of his will to realize that the clairvoyant instinct of his poet's mind was an invincible weapon in that art of life to which he paid so little heed. His mind was capable of but one loyalty, that was to beauty, beauty in art; his untiring aim was to express it. He was accustomed to view with a certain contemptuous pity, quite lacking in sympathy, the abandonment to the soft slavery of women which he saw in his friends. To him the flesh alone spoke vainly, leaving his will, his spirit, free. The mad caprices, which his indifference and his

beauty not seldom inspired, had never tempted him from his allegiance. Art,—friends, whose voices were but the chorus of acolytes to his throned goddess; such had been Aytoun's life for many unbroken years. Sometimes his friends divining the power he left unused, would question him jealously as to the cause of his indifference.

"L'art et les amis," he would say.

"Et les femmes?"

"Parole d'honneur, ça n'entre pas."

This was no affectation but the simple truth.

He had come to America for a short visit to exhibit his pictures, and in response to a vague sense of responsibility to his country too seldom heeded. He was no more genially inclined than ever towards making relations with the world, but he found his usual independence curiously shaken by the sense of solitude which he experienced in his native land. In this mood he had gone

to the opera, scanning the faces of the women in the boxes with curiosity and a certain unexpected pride in their distinction.

When under the crowned brightness of Helen's brilliant beauty, he recognized the boyish fancy of his youth, he was astonished and pleased, and experienced a very distinct sensation. He recalled the keen chagrin he had experienced at her girl's indifference and her misunderstanding of him. He admitted the persistence with which her memory had haunted him during his first years of absence, and had impulsively written to her.

On the day he had gone to see her, he recognized with his keen observation every line of her perfected beauty, and responded with all his sensitive nerves to every expression of the charm which lay in her voice, her smile, her manner. Her quick reply to his letter, her gracious, unaffected welcome, flattered him,

and yet—and yet—although he had asked her consent he had not returned to see her. His old shyness took possession of him, and his deeply fixed reluctance to form any relation which might absorb him, or separate him from his art, once more commanded him.

And now this unexpected meeting in the gallery—"really, she was very disturbing!" "How clever she is," he mused; "how amazing the feminine instinct." The exquisite flattery of her manner, her unaffected interest in his work, again took possession of his mind with its soft persuasion, and he smiled to himself. The sound of her voice was in his ears—and he confessed to himself that he had never quite forgotten it. Its deep music, its mysterious languors,—how it expressed her. The droop of her white lids under the straight brows came back to him, her brilliant, upward glance of sudden understanding. "What eyes!" he said.

"I should like to paint them. What has she done with herself—she is rich, idle, probably unhappy; unless the nature I once knew is quite subdued, and it is not; she is far more intelligent than I thought. No, she is too complex, too difficult."

His thoughts ran thus about her as he finished his walk, and recurred afterwards during the week that followed. He left a card at Mrs. Rivington's door, but the days were long, she had prolonged her drive in the park, and, indeed, the hour was early, he had not thought to find her.

Chapter V.



THE first warm days of April were succeeded by a sudden return of cold, of rain and wind; most of Helen's friends had sailed for Europe, and there was a cessation of opera. Helen had spent several evenings at home, with no other occupation than her own thoughts, which, as usually happened under such conditions, had been making her very uncomfortable. She was seated one day in her drawing-room, idly watching the rain which drove against the window, her book fallen from her hand, her thoughts wandering aimlessly, when she heard the roll of a carriage and a ring at the door. The servant entered the room and asked if she were receiving, and on her affirmative answer, announced "Mrs. Lindsay."

"Why, Kate," said Mrs. Rivington,

rising and kissing her cheek, "how awfully good of you! I didn't suppose anything would bring you out on such a day."

"My dear," Mrs. Lindsay replied, "I was bored to extinction, and thought you would cheer me up."

"A sort of last resort when everything fails," Helen laughed. "Never mind, I am grateful for my mercies. Sit down, I'll ring for some tea. I am very glad to see you."

Mrs. Lindsay threw off her wrap and settled herself in the chair by the fire, putting out a small foot in a high-heeled shoe to the blaze.

"Oh! how comfortable this fire is—it is as disagreeable outside as John was last night; but, never mind! he is gone, and that woman with him."

"Good heavens!" said Helen, "you don't mean to say your husband's eloped?"

"Eloped! Of course not; he wouldn't

know how; it's his aunt who has done nothing but show me my duty since she came. She makes John perfectly unbearable while she is in the house. He always agrees with her! Fancy—I can't do anything with him while she is in the house."

She was a tall, slight woman, very fashionably dressed, an expression of restless discontent in her brilliant eyes, which were black as if they had been washed in ink. Her face was pale, almost triangular in shape with its whimsical small chin and impertinent nose, her small mouth was brilliantly red, her voice was clear, high pitched and decided.

Helen took up a bit of embroidery, which lay on the sofa beside her, and looked at her friend.

"Relations are trying, I admit; is anything else the matter?"

"Oh, no," Mrs. Lindsay replied, "only I am so tired of New York and

John won't listen to my going over as every one else does—he says he doesn't believe in my tearing across the Atlantic every year—he thinks we ought to stay at home and encourage American industries—American industries indeed! Can't you hear him? He delivered me a long lecture about it last night at dinner—we dined at home for the first time in three months. I think that is what is the matter. I am afraid I was not intended for domestic life. Never mind, I shall have to get my gowns over here. He will regret that I am sure. I shall make myself look a perfect fright.”

“He ought to be satisfied with your conscientious encouragement of the American dressmaker at least.”

“Well, he is good I admit.”

“You are incorrigible. To hear you, one would believe you were a heartless, frivolous thing—you will never admit all the good things I know about you—

now confess, where have you been this afternoon? You look guilty. 'Children's Nursery,' or 'The Hospital for the Blind'—or the—"

"Do be quiet," said Mrs. Lindsay.

"It is something worse yet! You have been regularly slumming, and have a basket and provisions in your carriage this minute!"

"Well, it is empty, and I didn't bring it in." She laughed outright. "What have you been doing yourself since Lent began?"

"Oh nothing—nothing—absolutely nothing; it is dull I must confess."

"Why don't we arrange something?"

"What is there to do?"

"Shall we go somewhere for Sunday?"

Mrs. Lindsay demurred. "Oh, no, it is too early for the country, and then such weather! We should be cross and quarrel before we got back to town."

"Well, then come and dine with me

—I will ask anyone you like—come say who you want, Kate.”

“No, I don’t like dinners, they bore me to death, or to indigestion which leads to it. I am always put next to somebody I don’t like, and then I overeat.”

Helen laughed. “But there are dinners and dinners; we have paid off all our debts by this time, and might arrange something amusing.” She stopped a moment thinking. “We needn’t dine at home, we might borrow Graham Murray’s studio. Did you ever see it?”

“No, I don’t think I have.”

“My dear,” said Mrs. Rivington, “it is the most beautiful place I have ever seen—in that new building overlooking the park. I think he would lend it to us, and we could get some nice people together, it might be quite amusing—What do you think?”

“Is it really queer and different?”

asked Mrs. Lindsay. "It might be nice."

"I shan't describe it to you, but we will go there one day and see it if you like."

"Shall we give it together?"

"Yes, why not?"

"John won't be here, but your husband will, I suppose."

"Yes, and I think it might amuse him. He said the other day he would like to see the rooms. What a pity Mr. Lindsay will be away. Your domesticity isn't lasting very long, is it?"

"Quite long enough—but who shall we have?"

"Oh, Grace Armitage, I suppose, and Mrs. de Courcy."

"Yes, Grace is so decorative and Mrs. de Courcy will dance. We must have Teddy, too."

Mrs. Rivington looked up in surprise. "Is Teddy de Courcy here?"

"Yes, didn't you know? He landed last week."

"How is he looking?"

"Oh, very fit indeed—with a fresh stock of stories and bibelots. He has begun to distribute them already. I wish you could see the fan he has brought me."

"How nice of him," said Helen. "He never forgets you, does he? But no wonder you are friends. You are really so amusing, you two, when you are together. It doesn't make much difference who else we ask to the dinner, you and Teddy would make anything go."

"I'm afraid he will get drunk, but as he is funnier than ever that way, I suppose it doesn't matter."

"His wife will keep him in order, I think. He always behaves better when she is there."

"The reason why he stays away so much, I suppose."

"Undoubtedly."

"There is Graham Murray himself and his wife," said Mrs. Rivington.

"Yes, of course, she is a nice woman. I like her."

"Yes, so do I; but I do wish she wouldn't always wreath her brow with ivy. It was pretty some years ago, but why does she go on wearing it?"

"To deck the ruin I suppose," said Mrs. Lindsay. "Dear me, if people could only see how they looked. It is fatal to be original at her age."

"Her age, my dear, is 1830. We must be grateful, she doesn't wear side curls and hoops."

"We have five women now. We must think of some men."

"Who shall we ask? Dear me! what a dearth there is of them. I wish we could discover some new ones."

"So do I," said Mrs. Lindsay with emphasis; "they might have some gratitude for all we do for them. For my

part, I'm tired of society anyway. The men are all utterly spoiled, and as for the women they are cats, the whole of them, they do nothing but talk about each other—I am sure they do about me, and about you too, my dear ; don't think you are exempt."

"I don't suppose I am," said Helen quietly. She had taken a small tablet from a table on which to write the list of guests and now sat waiting, pencil in hand, quite undisturbed. "Why do you go out then?"

"Because there is nothing else to do," said Mrs. Lindsay, looking moodily into the fire. Then she rose impulsively and seated herself by Helen on the sofa. "Whom have you written down," she asked with interest.

"No one else," said Helen. "Can't you suggest someone?"

"No, I can't. I only know the old ones."

Helen was silent a moment.

"What are you thinking of?" asked Mrs. Lindsey.

"I was wondering whether you would like a man I met in school and who has just come over here with his pictures."

"You don't mean to tell me you—
—for if you do I think I might."

"Why would you? I thought you didn't like actors."

"Well, ordinarily I don't—I think they are queer and I never do see what to say to them. But some advantage dragged me in to see the pictures the other day when I was sitting with her, and I liked them. I think I will have my portrait done just as if he is nice. I don't want to be like John has been meaning to have me done."

"He is nice, very—but I don't know whether you would like him."

"Why not?" asked Mrs. Lindsey, with a little air of chagrin.

"Oh, well," said Helen, "after all perhaps you would—there is only one thing absolutely certain about you, and that is your unexpectedness. We will ask him anyway."

"Very well, now we need another woman and two more men to make up the dozen."

"There are the Bertrams and Tom Cary."

"Would the Bertrams come in from the country? They only went out last week?"

"Oh, yes, I think so, and they are really very nice. She is so pretty, and I like Louis, too. We always get on very well together, and if we want Tom Cary, he won't come unless she is invited."

"Are you friends again with Tom?" Helen asked.

"Oh yes, no one is worth quarrelling with. I thought he was good looking once. How could I?"

"So he is, very," said Helen. "I am sure he thinks so himself."

"He ought to know, he is the best authority, he has given the subject thorough attention. They are none of them worth thinking about. After all my old John is the only one I could ever put up with, and he is a necessary evil. Here is the tea. Give me a cup—and let's talk some more about the dinner."

The servant brought in the table and lighted the lamps, which filled the room with a warm light, shining upon Helen's dark head and her white hands busy among the tea cups. Mrs. Lindsay drank her tea leisurely and with evident relish, while they discussed the details of their plans, and then it grew late; it was still raining and had become quite dark. Mrs. Lindsay remembered she was dining early and going to the play; she rose to go, but turned suddenly at the door.

"We haven't decided what day we shall have it!" she exclaimed.

"To be sure, how silly." Helen turned to her desk and referred to her engagement book. "Will next week Thursday do? That is the first day I am free."

"Yes, I think so," said Mrs. Lindsay, drawing on her gloves. "Good-bye, dear; I must really go. Oh, I forgot, John may be at home by that time, and that will make thirteen."

"What shall we do, we can't get along without you?"

"Never mind, it won't make any difference. John and I are always at sixes and sevens."

"How absurd," said Helen laughing.

Mrs. Lindsay kissed her affectionately. "Nice lady," she said. "Good-bye, I can't stay another minute."

Chapter VI.

WHEN Helen sat down at her desk the next morning after this conversation with her friend, and began her note to Aytoun, she found her pen a laggard. She was astonished at this, and made a mental admission of her self-consciousness. She knew quite well that she was taking an aggressive step in giving Aytoun this proof of her recollection of him and following up what she more than half suspected was a retreat. She had assured herself of the early hour which he had chosen to leave his card, and had sufficiently deplored her own curiosity. She knew herself to be taking account of the appearance and not the actual and significant intention in acknowledging the empty courtesy by this invitation. But she

justified herself for this error in tactics by the thought of his remembered shyness, and refused to believe this expression other than an indication of his persistent character. She laughed a little nervously at the care with which she wrote and re-wrote her formal little note, saying to herself that in any case she was not taking him seriously.

She half expected a refusal of her invitation, and when Aytoun's note of acceptance arrived she was relieved, and contentedly admitted to herself an accession of intelligence in the management of particular cases.

The balance of Aytoun's desire and reluctance to see Mrs. Rivington again was as she had expected, tipped in the negative scale by the weight of his in-born shyness; her invitation promptly displaced this, and he found himself looking forward to their meeting with an anticipation as pleasurable as it was disturbing.

When he arrived at the studio in the top of the tall building to which Mrs. Rivington's note had directed him, on the evening of the day set for the dinner, it was already filled with people, laughing and talking with the prompt interchange of long familiarity. He paused at the door, confused with the sense of his own strangeness, when Mrs. Rivington caught sight of him and came forward, smiling, to welcome him.

"My husband has failed me," she said. "He had promised to come, and I thought he would up to the last moment, but he rarely abandons his whist. It is I who have to give him up after all." She laughed a little, hesitating slightly over her words; then she turned and introduced Aytoun to Murray Graham, the owner of the beautiful room in which they had assembled. He was a tall man with reddish hair, growing awkwardly away from a fine brow, whose simple cordiality of manner put Aytoun

at his ease. He recognized the brother artist and they fell into mutual questionings, Mrs. Rivington standing by when the Bertrams, who were the late comers, arrived, and the company sat down to dinner.

Aytoun was between Helen and her friend Mrs. Armitage, who began talking about some marriage, just announced, of people well known to them both, and for a moment he was left to himself. He took advantage of this moment of quiet to look about him.

The room was large and of a curious shape, with one deeply curving recess and many nooks and corners hung with curtains. Curious lamps of brass and bronze, shining mysteriously among the shadows which gathered in the corners of the room, lit into luminous ruby smoothly hanging folds of deep red drapery, or with wandering rays brought out here and there the figures or foliage of a tapestry. In a far corner above a

low seat with cushions, the early moon scattered opal prisms through a painted window. The table stood in the recess, whose ceiling was supported by fluted columns of gold with carved and wreathing ornaments of laurel, and tapestry hung upon the wall. The table was in the form of a half circle, following the shape of the recess, the seats were curved divans set against the wall and heaped with pillows. In the curve of the table opposite to where the guests were sitting were placed two enormous Roman jars of a light green color, adorned with deeper green leaves, which held tall laurel trees, in which lights were concealed shining from among the foliage with the clear blue radiance of a diamond. The table was covered with a heavy yellow brocade, and heaped with roses and orchids, while orchids hung from the ceiling. The tinkling music of a Spanish band of mandolin players behind one of the curtains, filled the

room with its sparkling spray-like sound. The glimmer from the laurel trees brought out with clear lights and clean shadows, the faces of the men and women who sat about the table. The strongly variant types of the women astonished Aytoun. He had known his own country only in the quiet by-ways of New England, where the emaciated English pattern is so generally impressed upon a melancholy and strenuous race, he was utterly unprepared for this contrasting combination of exotic beauty, which the great city with its inevitable choice of the best had offered as it were for his inspection; he alone among them being the conscious and impressed spectator. At the outer curve of the table, between the columns, sat Mrs. Armitage, decorative truly, with the fine columnar lines of her throat, her short, well-cut nose, with its fine nostrils, and the free rippled sweep of the heavy, reddish hair. She moved

her head with a proud, almost courageous lift as she joined conversation with her neighbor, Murray Graham, speaking in a deep and resonantly musical voice. "A beautiful, high-spirited and intelligent woman," Aytoun thought as he watched her. She was talking to Murray about his last new portrait of a woman well known to them all, judiciously flattering, genuinely interested. Aytoun wondered what he should find to say when she should turn that beautiful head toward him — he was content to wait, he enjoyed looking at her.

At one end of the table sat Mrs. de Courcy, a very dark woman, of a pure Andalusian type. She was laughing and talking, the focus of a story telling eddy. Her brilliant dark face, and flowing line of throat and chin, floated like a tropic flower over the wave of her snowy white shoulders. She wore many jewels and radiated warm happiness and good humor.

At the other end Mrs. Bertram sat primly in her seat, fair-haired with a Puritan fairness of skin, dressed in white, a blue ribbon in her yellow locks and no other color but the two roses of her cheeks and the rose at her shoulder. There was a faint blue shadow about the eyes, and a delicate fragility was suggested in the slight roundness of the arms, the blue veins in her temples. Her eyes were keen and alert, and her voice was clear with no mysteries or suggestions in its tones. Next her was Tom Cary, master of the Willow Brook Hunt, a tall, thin man with a very straight nose, a drooping, fair mustache and a fatigued expression about his keen, blue eyes. She was chaffing him with a light ease and evident interest, which showed that she not only appreciated, but understood him. Mrs. Rivington and Mrs. Lindsay, in arranging their dinner, had not neglected to put them together. They never went

where the other was not invited — not that they were in love with each other — far from it, but she was the prettiest woman of the young set they both belonged to, and he the smartest man. It looked well to be together.

Their conversation was the light running gossip of the hunting field, or of their friends, whom they referred to by their first names. "Ruth is leading Tony cleverly up the fence this time, don't you think?" Aytoun overheard her saying to her companion: "Yes, it looks like it now," was the answer. "She has a wonderfully light hand, but he is a rank refuser. Nobody knows what will happen at the finish."

On the other side of Mrs. Bertram a small dark-haired man with quickly moving eyes and an inky black moustache was shouting across the table to Mrs. Lindsay. This was Teddy de Courcy, and he was in his best form. Helen had insisted on putting him on

the opposite side of the table from Mrs. Lindsay, and, as she had anticipated, they had struck fire and were keeping the table in a roar.

Helen watched Aytoun as he surveyed the room and the company, divining the effect of the beauty of the one and the variety of the other upon his mind, with that quick intuition of another's thought which was her peculiar gift.

"It is a pretty room," she said, with an upward inflection.

Aytoun looked at the fair company of laughing, white shouldered women about the rose-strewn table and at Mrs. Armitage with her auburn hair and gown of velvet, seated in the midst, against the background of tapestry and fluted pillars.

"Venice and Veronese," he exclaimed enthusiastically, "wonderfully beautiful! I am so glad you asked me."

She smiled and began to tell him of the people, introducing him to his other neighbor, and then she characteristically brought up a topic of interest common to them all and soon the four, Mrs. Armitage and Murray, Aytoun and Helen, were talking about art and architecture, literature and music, the knell of realism, the birth of symbolism. They were very cultivated indeed. Mrs. Armitage chanted a line of Byron, Helen quoted a verse of Verlaine, which Aytoun had last heard from the lips of the convict poet himself, in a reeking brasserie on the other side of the Seine, and which had haunted him ever since.

*"Qu'as tu fait,— o toi qui voilà pleurant
sans cesse."*

*"Qu'as tu fait o toi qui voilà de ta
jeunesse."*

The despairing cry of a ruined soul dropping simply, pathetically from the pure lips of this daughter of the Puri-

tans, startled Aytoun again with the same thrill of sympathy which had united them that moment in the gallery before his picture. She hesitated a moment—"how does that verse end?" she said. "I forget."

Aytoun finished it. Their eyes met and one more unforgettable instant was added to their lives. For a moment the gay voices and laughter sounded afar, and the noisy tinkle of the mandolins sank to a murmur. The solitude of this insistent sympathy bound them in an invisible circle which contained nothing but their consciousness of each other. Then it passed.

"How long have you lived, I'd like to know?" he asked her, puzzled, half laughing. "You seer! with a saint's face. What have you to do with the occult maladies of a lost soul? Where have you known despair?"

"Ah," she said, looking at him with her mysterious eyes, "the griefs of the

imagination are many, I am centuries old."

"What's that you say," asked Murray, "about being centuries old?"

"Oh," said Mrs. Armitage, "Helen's romantic. It's her most effective mood, but not her only one; ask her to dance."

Helen looked up and saw Teddy de Courcy, who had left his seat at the end of the table, and was dancing a *bolero* to the Spanish tune of the mandolins. They were all applauding him, clapping their hands in time to the music, as he threw his slight figure into the graceful poses of the dance.

"Oh yes, come dance," said Murray, "dance, Mrs. Rivington, dance!" they all entreated.

She hesitated a moment, and then her face breaking into a merry smile, her eyes sparkling with excitement, she slipped from her place and joined the dancer on the floor.

She was dressed in a trailing gown of

yellow satin, with a deep red rose fastened in her hair; bending low, she swept her gown away from her feet, gathering its heavy folds in one hand, while with the other she held her fan above her head in a pose of indescribable individuality and grace, and then she danced, untaught, unguided, except by her own beauty, which seemed to dictate every dissolving pose.

Aytoun watched her, bewildered, fascinated beyond hope of recall.

The dainty challenge with which she threw back her head and lightly stamped her slippered foot, the luring invitation of her liquid eyes, half unconscious of their charm, as she bent and swayed with a fawn-like lightness of motion, swept over Aytoun's senses with a strange feeling of faintness.

Suddenly she stopped and threw her slight body backwards, lifting her fan once more above her head.

There was a storm of applause.

"She never danced so well," whispered Mrs. Armitage.

"Oh, dance again," they entreated, and still protested as she found her way to her seat, blushing, confused, astonished at herself.

And then the merry contagion seized them all, and there was a confusion of singing and dancing.

Aytoun could only look on with ever increasing astonishment at these people born in artificiality, nurtured on conventions, who in a rare moment of graceful abandon could return so easily to natural, almost childish, amusement.

The scene changed continually.

Mrs. Armitage with an applauding circle about her, snatched a gold cap and an inlaid sword from an Oriental canopy and drawing her sumptuous gown away from her fine straight ankles and ruffled petticoat essayed to show her newly learned skill in fencing. Throwing herself forward and recover-

ing position with astonishing ease and grace, she revealed the Greek perfection of her figure.

And then the group dissolved and formed again in a ring under Mrs. de Courcy's leadership, dancing and singing at the top of their voices.

"Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer true," they sang, these women with the diadems of queens, as if they had been a group of ragged urchins on a street corner.

Aytoun wondered how long their spirits would last, and finally they did become exhausted.

Teddy de Courcy threw himself at Mrs. Lindsay's feet, swearing quite audibly his life long devotion, and Murray took luxurious possession of a comfortable divan, Mrs. de Courcy and Mrs. Armitage on either side, while he explained benevolently with a not too distant appreciation, his faith in the religion of beauty.

Mrs. Grahame, she of the ivy wreath, had become very much fatigued, for she had danced with rash enthusiasm forgetting her years. She was fanning herself breathlessly, while Mr. Lindsay and Louis Bertram talked across her ample draperies about the latest flurry in the street.

Mrs. Bertram and Tom Cary, who had held themselves slightly aloof from the prevailing gayety, were pursuing their study of each other, and Helen and Aytoun found themselves in one of the quiet corners, partly screened by a heavy red curtain, which hung against a gilded column.

In a moment, this slight ebullition of gayety, like a burst of sunshine on a wintry day, was over. Aytoun was astonished to witness its sudden dissolution, to see that no sleeping lions were loosened in this merry play; the atmosphere of cool detachment, of familiarity without affection, of uncon-

ventional demonstration, without the most remote significance in impulse, amazed him, with his totally differing experiences, his ignorance of his own country. The will o' wisp of febrile gayety and self-forgetting excitement floats usually over old marshes of decay, but here it dances over ice.

The mandolins still tinkled on, but the flowers lay scattered on the floor, the lights burned a little dimly, and the delicious quiet of the end of a feast settled down upon the room. In a moment they would all scatter, but just now they talked to each other in pleasant mellowed confidences in a passing moment of content.

Behind the curtain Aytoun and Helen sat as if alone, the voices and the music coming to their ears in an unheeded murmur.

The excitement of the dance still glowed in her cheeks, and a curly tendril of hair escaped over her brow.

She was rallying him gayly about his fear of her, sitting with her hands clasped over her knees, her head thrown slightly back, while she looked at him from under her straight brows provokingly.

Aytoun began to dream, and the unforgotten fancies of his boyhood clasped him again as he sat there in the curtained shadow listening to her voice. He felt again the little mortal sinking of the heart, when she turned her head and looked at him full with those deep clairvoyant eyes. The feeling of slavery, of subjection, which had frightened him as a boy, swept over him now overpoweringly. She had one look he had never quite banished from his mind, it had haunted him for years. The red, half-open lips, the slight dilating of the sensitive nostrils under the indrawn breath, the drooping liquid eyes, ah, it was intolerable! She could not know how cruel it was. So she had looked

in his remembrance, so she was looking now, but her voice was clearly sweet; as she repeated :

"Confess, you are afraid!"

"And if I am," he answered faltering, "are you not afraid of my fear — there is contagion in a panic."

"No," she said, meeting his intensely questioning gaze, with a disarming glance from frank wide-open eyes, "no, you understand me. Perhaps we may understand each other. There is no fear where no darkness is. We were friends once, let us be friends again — say yes."

He took her hands and kissed them lingeringly, one after the other, unbuked, completely conquered, and in her face was a look of beautifying happiness, and in his mind the farewell to calculation or regret as he faltered :

"Anything, anything to you."

Chapter VII.

IRIGHT weather came again in the last days of April, and with it a final week of opera, a parting obligation to the winter's occupations.

Aytoun was astonished at the willingness he observed in himself to accept the invitations which came to him to attend it, from Mrs. Lindsay, who was still contemplating her portrait, from Mrs. Armitage, who confessed herself interested in the personality of the famous painter, and from others of her kind. He no longer attempted to misname the preoccupation which filled his nights and haunted his footsteps like a presence, and if he had, the keenness of his disappointment at not seeing Mrs. Rivington at the Opera would have enlightened him. The resentful reluctance

to be made a plaything of, his own tormenting shyness, and his admitted ignorance of the influences and prejudices which governed Helen's nature, had all been banished, and he daily strove to solve the glittering puzzle which was always before his mind. For some reason she had chosen to be interested in him; the fear which the recognition of this interest brought, still disturbed, but no longer ruled him; instead, the persistent vision of her face hypnotized his consciousness into a delicious subjection. This attitude was so strongly felt that he made no effort to see her, but waited impatiently for her summons. For this reason he had gone every night to the opera, expecting and hoping to see her, but a passing illness of her husband kept her housed, and it was only on the last night, when the lights went up after the first act, that he discovered her sitting in her box with General Rivington beside her.

She was dressed very simply in white, looking like a girl beside her gray-haired husband, and at the moment Aytoun saw her, was sitting a little languidly, her hands laid carelessly in her lap, while she still held her pre-occupied gaze upon the fallen curtain, but when in obedience to the communication of Aytoun's gaze, she turned and recognized him, he thought he saw a permission for him to join her.

Her manner was very simple and sweet, as she introduced him to her husband and offered him a seat. He was impressed by the change from the brilliant aggressive mood in which he had last seen her. As he noted the shade of melancholy on her quiet face, the vision of her lonely youth and womanhood seen thus in this glimpse of repose swept over him with a feeling very near to pity, and this sadness and the womanly sensitiveness of her mouth stirred him even more deeply

than the victorious gayety of her former mood.

Although intensely virile in will, and in the vigorous development of mind and body, Aytoun possessed something of the woman's instinct, an almost clairvoyant intuition, the common foundation of the artistic and the feminine natures. In a moment while she sat there quite simply, her clear eyes meeting his, unclouded with any preoccupation or thought of self, the riddle was riddle no longer, and the loneliness, the beauty and the sadness of her soul was revealed to him, clear as a limpid stream. He set his teeth and looked away. General Rivington was talking to him, speaking cordially of his pleasure in seeing a friend of his wife's. Aytoun observed how brilliant were the dark eyes, how erect the figure, but the vigor had left his voice, which was dry, but distinguished in its modulation. He questioned Aytoun about the painters

of his own day, but his mind had suffered the inevitable crystallization of old age, and he became a little peremptory in some of his statements. Aytoun was compelled to parry them as well as he could to escape a disagreement with him, and then he thought of the evidently hopeless separation between Helen's mind and that of her husband, and of the courteous consideration which was only too apparent in his manner towards his wife. "So this is her horizon," he thought to himself, "this her prison house. There is no escape from gratitude."

Helen did not attempt to turn the conversation, but the sadness of her face took on a deeper shade, and Aytoun's comprehension of her mind became more clearly defined. She did not realize the significance of this passing mood. There are many revelations in an ebbing tide.

A number of other men came in, with

whom Mrs. Rivington talked in a perfunctory manner, but as she motioned to Aytoun to take the seat directly behind her, they soon departed.

And then the lights fell again, and the music filled the air with its vibrating waves, inundating Helen's mind, answering, subduing and expressing the bitter longings of her empty soul. Aytoun sat quietly behind her in silence his mind, which was filled with thoughts of her, unconsciously communicating its influence to hers and gradually Helen become conscious of this thought and was vaguely comforted. They spoke but little, but a delicious sympathy, wordless but expressed to them both by the music which surrounded them like an ether, merged their double consciousness into one.

Just in front of him, near, almost too near, was the white line of her throat and shoulder, he could hear the quiet taking of her breath and the faint per-

fume of her hair made his heart beat dumbly. Scenes succeeded scenes, one act followed another, and the applause rose and lapsed into silence. Helen knew nothing, but this strange happiness which was rising in her heart like a flood. Aytoun realized nothing, except this new understanding of her, which was absorbing all his consciousness, and which under the appeal of her beauty and her loneliness strengthened into a tyrannical impulse of possession. As Helen sat there so near to him, she felt the silent command, turned away her head, and set her whitening lips, "No, no," she said to herself, "I will not look at him, I dare not."

The music stopped, her husband left them, to give the orders for the carriage and they were alone.

Helen moved from her chair. "Is it over?" she asked him with the dazed look of one awakening from a dream.

"No, not over," Aytoun answered

with an insistent look, "Only just begun."

"But yes, it is quite over," she repeated, wilfully ignoring his meaning in the tremor of her new born fear. "Will you give me my cloak?"

Aytoun put it over her shoulders, and then as she turned, he paused deliberately in the half darkness and looked down upon her bended head.

There was a moment of intolerable suspense while the silence laid its commands upon them, and then the stronger will was victor, and Helen threw back her head and looked full into Aytoun's eyes, meeting there a look of worship, of comprehension, of command, and returning her confession of mingled joy and fear.

Aytoun was satisfied.

Chapter VIII.

THE days which followed brought to Helen the nearest approach to happiness she had ever known. She saw Aytoun constantly, and the impression of intimacy strengthened daily. He never permitted her to feel that he had forgotten her, and there were no lapses unaccounted for. They had reached that delicious period of friendship in which they never parted without some definite arrangement for a future meeting.

When Helen awoke in the morning, it was with an impression of beatitude as if from some blissful drama of the night, she would keep her eye-lids closed to prolong the moment of returning consciousness with its dim suggestion of content, before she awoke to the

knowledge of another day with its certainty of full and satisfying pleasure. The depressing environment of her youth and the negative and confining influences of her marriage had never brought her anything in any way comparable to the sense of mental exhilaration which she daily experienced through association with Aytoun. She had, unnoticed by those about her, a profoundly curious mind, and a just and exquisite literary taste. It was an instant and irresistible delight to her to find her impressions and opinions ratified by the agreement of Aytoun's larger experience, her taste justified by his approbation and sympathy.

"Who told you to read this book," he asked her one day, picking up a rare volume of the poetry of a young Frenchman who died after having put forth a slender book of strangely beautiful verse, whose curious sought-out effects and indefinable charm, made his work

only appreciated by a very few of those best acquainted with the symbolic school of writers, which arose after his death.

"I don't believe there is another volume in the country—I knew him well," he said. Then he told her of the man; his pitiable ugliness, the exquisite flavor of his mind, his early death; and Helen listened, her mind closing over this and other treasures, which his wider experience offered her, believing that in the enjoyment of his friendship she was only obeying the demands of her own nature. By force of the extreme distinction of her taste, her forms of expression had a peculiar grace and almost literary value of style, which he was the first to recognize, remark upon, and stimulate. Every day he brought to her tea table at the hour when she usually received him, some book difficult to find which he had procured for her, or sketches of out of the way places where he had found a peculiar individuality or charm.

For the moment they were both content. Aytoun was charmed by the finesse of this mind of a distinguished woman such as he had never known before, held in willing subjection by the loyal directness of her friendship and responding deeply to the purity and sweetness of her character. Her wishes, her wants, became every day clearer and more important to him, and in observing them he was for the moment satisfied, and to them both the impression of these days of their growing friendship was one of almost unbroken quiet, of an enveloping and subduing charm.

Helen's friends found the new-comer attractive, and when she did not see him quietly at her own house, she met him at small dinners and parties to the theatre, and once they drove out into the country on one of the road-coaches, which had been taken by Mrs. Lindsay, and lunched at a club house with a party of her friends. Together they reveled

in the glories of their first day in the open, as they drove along among the flowering trees, the faint blue sky and floating clouds of spring above them amid a chorus of exulting birds.

In June, Helen and General Rivington, somewhat earlier than was their habit moved to Newport, whither Mrs. Lindsay soon followed them, and as she had finally decided upon her portrait, and it was as yet too early to be disturbed by the midsummer season, Aytoun decided to paint it there. He found a room in a little farm house near the sea, and there established his studio.

General Rivington's house had been built before the time of marble palaces, or Queen Anne cottages. Its massive simplicity was softened by luxuriant vines. Within, the rooms were large and of a stately formality. Helen had wisely refrained from any attempt to alter or modernize them, but had softened the brilliancy of the damasks

and bright brocades with a profusion of plants and flowers. She had, however, persuaded her husband to widen the veranda which overlooked the sea and there under its broad roof she had hung swinging Indian seats, and arranged screened corners where she could idly watch the waves, which broke upon the rocks below.

General Rivington was very fond of his Newport house, but it was his custom to spend the early weeks of the summer in yachting with his friends. So it happened that June in Newport was the quietest month of Helen's year. She made no effort to anticipate the season, which turns the inhabitants of the beautiful still city by the sea into moon-maniacs during August, but abandoned herself with joy to the reposeful influences of the embowering trees, the blue and sleeping sea. Sometimes in those lonely weeks, the beauty which surrounded her seemed almost too fair.

"This summer for once," she thought blissfully, "Spring has kept its promises;" thus her happy days slipped by her, each one crystalline and magical, and in her heart was the song of birds.

She saw Aytoun every day, and their friendship seemed at last to have found its proper setting. Every succeeding mood found its natural expression. Sometimes when life was vivid and youth was with them, they would ride together in the early morning, breathing the salt air of the sea which floated to them mingled with the perfumes of the gardens luxurious with the roses of June. Often Helen would come to his studio in the afternoon, while the portrait of her friend was being painted.

Unconsciously to herself, Mrs. Lindsay was enjoying the free atmosphere which haunts a studio. Bohemia, the land of liberty, waves its flag wherever there are gathered together an easel, a palette and some brushes. Mrs. Lind-

say would smoke her cigarette as she posed, gossiping the while and telling stories; while Helen, speaking little, would watch the painting, asking Aytoun a question here and there, delighting in the exhibition of a fine talent intent on its work, watching the concentrated look of the eyes, the swiftly moving brushes, the rapid and mysterious transfer of the face of the sitter with its elusive individuality to the canvas.

Aytoun was interested in his subject, and had rendered with astonishing faithfulness the alert sarcastic expression of Mrs. Lindsay's brilliant dark face. The flexibility of the slight figure was indicated in the pose, sinuous, suggestive, daringly original, which represented her body, leaning, almost twisted, backward in the chair, the wrists crossing, the small feet in their high-heeled shoes crossed also and pointed sharply downward. He had recognized with

joy the perfection of her type, and had expressed it with just that degree of accentuation necessary to reveal a personality. The dress was a little fantastic; yellow with a curious green embroidery, some black about the waist. There was an emerald feather in her hair and emeralds on her yellow shoes.

There she was, subtle, daring, exquisite, intensely modern, the product of her passing hour; as brilliant and as brittle as a butterfly.

Aytoun forgot sometimes that he was not alone, absorbed completely in the excitement of his work; he knew that he had hit the right note, and heard in imagination what his friends would say of it. He smiled to himself as he worked.

Helen was amused at her friend's attitude before Aytoun's idea of her. He knew his sitter so much better than she knew herself. The very unmistakable

and individual air of smartness about her pictured self, pleased Mrs. Lindsay evidently.

"I am glad," she would say as she descended from the platform to look curiously at the picture, "you have not made me out a milk-maid," and then she would nearly lose her temper over Aytoun's refusal to alter at her suggestion, any of the faults of her face.

"Faults," he would say smiling, turning toward her, palette in hand, "my dear Mrs. Lindsay, they are the most charming things about you—if it were not for the faults in people's faces I would paint no more portraits."

Helen looked and listened, happier than she knew, recognizing the expression of pride and power which he had worn before in the gallery with his pictures, and woman-like rejoicing with a thrill of intoxicating pride in her knowledge of her place in his thoughts; and she admired and praised him none

the less that he could seem to forget her, proud to see her slave a master. Sitting in the corner among the cushions of a broad seat by an open window, absorbed and fascinated, she watched from beneath her dreaming eye-lids the beautiful head and earnest face, grateful to the light which turned his hair to gold and defined the pure line of his throat.

His gestures as he painted were unconsciously expressive. Sometimes he would seem to wrestle with his work, standing firmly before it, one foot advanced, while he dealt the strokes he meant should tell, sometimes he caressed it with soft and curving touches. The cruelty of the curved mouth firmly set in the absorption of his work fascinated and vaguely frightened her. "How long," she asked herself in a dumb whisper, "How long will he choose to be a slave?"

At five they would take their tea,

which Aytoun made for them in little Indian cups, and they would sit quietly awhile, watching the long sweep of shore and sky through the open window of the little farm-house. He had hung the room in a blue-green stuff like the changeable blue-green of the sea, and had filled large jars with roadside flowers. A painted Indian table held his brushes and colors, a blue haze of cigarette smoke hung in the air. The little house was on the very edge of the water far away from the town. It was cool, detached and quiet. Even Mrs. Lindsay forgot her restlessness sometimes, and lapsed into a reverie.

One day when the portrait was nearly finished, Helen and Mrs. Lindsay loitered a little over their tea, and a sudden rain kept them until the room was gray with twilight. Mrs. Lindsay had been chattering merrily all the afternoon, but the quiet of the room, the regular wash of the waves on the beach

beneath them had calmed her into silence.

"Why so quiet?" Helen said, remarking her unusual mood.

"Oh, I like it here, it rests me; I forget I am in Newport, it does me good."

"Do you want to forget it? You know you wouldn't go anywhere else in the world."

"Would you?" Mrs. Lindsay asked in return.

They both laughed.

"There's nowhere else to go!" said Mrs. Lindsay.

Aytoun was silent for a moment and did not attempt to join in the conversation, but looked out upon the water, livid white in the twilight, upon which the rain made wavering lines like an etching upon silver.

It had turned quite cool, and he had lighted a fire in the chimney which cast a flickering glow upon the white dresses of the women. Helen was sitting in her

favorite attitude when she talked, her head thrown back, her hands clasped over her knees. Mrs. Lindsay, lying back in a deep chair, was smoking. The bright point of her cigarette shone in the half light.

As Aytoun listened to their voices he experienced an unexpected feeling of detachment, of strangeness; the taste for his old life suddenly recurred to him with a sharp and irresistible appeal. "Oh, yes! they were interesting, these people, or he had thought them so, but they were unreal, he was not of them."

Mrs. Lindsay's clear, high voice, with its vibrant, uncompromising English, grated upon his ears perceptibly. What a curious creature she was, amusing, yes, restless and fantastic; yet Helen understood her, was agreeing with her. Newport, indeed! He recalled the daily pageant with its varying scenes, the gathering at the Casino, the beauty of the women, the brutality of their veiled

and dainty insolence, the staring impertinence of the men; the utter aimlessness, the destroying inactivity of the brain expressed in their faces, set with the grim endurance of unending nothingness, astonished him. And they said there was no other place; good heavens! no other place! Mrs. Lindsay said that, yes—but Helen was agreeing with her. How could she? His eyes dwelt on her face, the low pure brow, fair as a pearl in the dim light, the poetic beauty of her eyes, the refined spirituality of her face, and a feeling of irritation, of dumb anger, against this something in her he could not understand, took possession of him. He had a sensation as of a veil suddenly dropped between them.

“It is degrading,” Helen continued, lightly laughing. “What do you think I heard to-day? Susie Bertram has not invited Mrs. de Courcy to her ball, and she is furious of course. They have

been intimate friends ever since I've known them. That will be another quarrel, I suppose, and quarrels are such bores."

"Not so very angry," said Mrs. Lindsay. "I saw her talking to Susie this morning with her sweetest smile. I wondered what was the matter."

"It won't do any good," said Helen; "there is only one way possible to make your place quite sure, and that is to give balls, and leave out half your friends — then they will not dare to treat you so themselves."

"Mrs. Bertram has certainly found that plan successful, I must admit, particularly as it seems to have been her own invention — she may well be proud of it."

"What a dreadful time that pretty little Mrs. Perkins is having," Helen continued. "She looked quite pale this morning. No one has spoken to her yet that I know of."

"Nothing in the world against her I suppose," asked Mrs. Lindsay.

"Oh, no, only that no one knows her, and, therefore, no one will."

"I wonder how long she will stay?"

"For good, my dear," said Helen. "She is very rich and I believe clever. Besides I saw Tom Cary walking with her near the beach yesterday. She will be all right next year."

"No, not next year—in two perhaps."

"What a place it is!" Helen continued, "it really is demoralizing. I don't think my character can bear more than one summer of it."

"It has been all over with mine for some time," laughed Mrs. Lindsay. "I can stay till the end of my days."

"No, not quite over," said Helen. "I must be truthful if you are not when you persist in denying that you have a heart somewhere concealed under your chiffons—I have not forgotten,"—

"Hush," cried Mrs. Lindsay, "I have forgotten my feelings. They are left behind in town, along with my winter furs. There is no use for them here."

They both laughed, and there was a little pause, in which Helen poured herself a second cup of tea, and Mrs. Lindsay lighted another cigarette.

"I overheard a couple of boys talking to-day," Helen went on, "at the Casino. Kate de Courcy's young brother and a friend, evidently a stranger, who was almost crying. 'I have just seen the only woman I have ever loved,' he said, 'and she didn't even bow to me.'"

"Poor boy," said Mrs. Lindsay; "he doesn't know his Newport."

"And it is so beautiful," said Helen, "How can we be wicked in so heavenly a place?"

"Wicked!" replied her friend, "that is the one thing I think we are not."

"And yet we are both luxurious and

idle. The other will come soon no doubt."

"I suppose so," said Mrs. Lindsay, "but now—what is the reason, I wonder!" She turned to Aytoun, who was standing by the window, looking out upon the water in a melancholy abstraction. "Come tell us what you think, Mr. Aytoun? What makes us so supernaturally good?"

Aytoun shrugged his shoulders and looked down at her in her dainty dress, as she blew the smoke idly from her little red lips.

"Why good?" he said; "because you are so pleased with your new toys, that you are not yet crying for other ones."

"You mean," said Helen, speaking seriously, "that when we are used to wealth and luxury, and they become a habit, that we shall seek for more dangerous playthings?"

"Yes, precisely," Aytoun replied, "I

do. But it may not be very soon, not until your fortunes become more permanent. Wall street is better for the morality of the country than the churches; a better leveller than democracy or death. At present with the luxury of Pompeii you have—" he hesitated a moment.

"The morality of Plymouth Rock," said Helen, rising and looking out of the window. "It has stopped raining," she said. "Come Kate, you daughter of the Puritans, no more cigarettes. We must go."

Aytoun opened the door, put them in their carriage, and watched them moodily as they drove off under the dripping trees.

Chapter IX.



WITH the beginning of July and the more insistent demands of her outward life, Helen's companionship with Aytoun was somewhat interrupted, and the impression of unbroken comradeship was succeeded by a strange alternation of sympathy and detachment, which tortured and perplexed him. The extraordinary emancipation of Helen's mind which by force of very wide reading had in some directions traveled farther in imagination than his in fact, had given her a very remarkable breadth of view and an accuracy of judgment as unusual in a woman as it was delightful. He frequently appealed to the exquisite justness of her taste during the painting of his pictures and their conversations often assumed the character of a consul-

tation of *confrères*, when they would almost forget each other in the excitement of their subject, and he would ask himself how it had been possible for such utterly different lives to have brought them thus together, sharing intellectually an almost identical point of view. Then the sight of her punctilious observance of some empty form, her sacrifice of hours of possible companionship for some smart social function exasperated him. Her loneliness, the innate sadness of her mind, which he realized had been fully revealed to him alone, appealed to his pity, and what seemed to him a willful and destructive waste of a nature which he knew to be filled with the sadness of humanity, the palpitating poetry of life, cast him into fits of angry despair. This grew, and became with his increasing passion for her beauty, a torturing obsession. During his walks by the cliffs, lost in the evening mists, or alone

in his studio, he sought continually to analyze her mysterious nature, to define this strange soul of a woman, this mixture of intelligence and inexperience of emancipated fancy, of captive will, of outward gayety, of secret melancholy. There had been no such tormenting perplexity in her character as he had known it in those early days in New York, or afterwards in the first weeks of the summer at Newport. Since the pre-occupations of her outward life had begun to claim her time, she seemed to him to have become quite another person. There were times when the scant courtesy she showed him, when he met her at the Casino, on the Polo field among her friends, or in some ball room he had invaded led by his desire to see her, infuriated him. Then the haunting shyness and suspicion of his nature would return with the unbearable thought that after all he might be but a plaything for her idle hours.

Helen could hardly have explained to herself why she wished no longer to see him in the world. She did not realize her own ungentleness, she only felt that she wanted him for herself, and found it impossible to talk with him, except when they were alone. But to him the sight of her, talking, laughing, dancing with these people, as if she were one of them, was intolerable. Sometimes his anger would reach the point of a decision to leave her and Newport together. Then a note would come summoning him to some long walk, or to dine with her alone, when they would pass hours of the most perfect sympathy, weaving closer than ever the web of association and memory which bound them, and she would seem to rejoice more than ever in the intellectual freedom of their companionship, finding an ever keener pleasure in speaking without subterfuge or convention. Sometime they would

pass hours in the dusk, watching the flickering pathway of the moon upon the water, in delicious desultory talk, when scraps of remembered verse and parallel impressions gathered from their different lives would rise to their lips. Sometimes they would go back to the time of their childhood and the years when they had known each other first, dwelling with interest upon every smallest treasure of their recollection. Sometimes they would speak in French, the language in which Helen felt she knew him best, talking softly to each other with the delicious familiarity of a friendship the most perfect of their lives, and Aytoun would forget the passing moments of separation from her, his anger and distrust.

"A mystery," he said to her one day, "you are a lovely mystery. I am seeking for your definition. Sometimes I think I have you, and then you turn

another face, and I must begin all over again. Never mind some day I shall have you, tight clasped—in a formula.”

Then she laughed and replied that she was a riddle not worth the solving; that she did not understand herself.

He would chide her sometimes for the waste of her talents. She had indeed a lovely deep voice, untrained, irregular, of a haunting quality. “You could sing,” he would say. “Write too, I think, if you would try.” And she would listen meditatively, happily, realizing the clearer development of her mind, its growing capacity for impressions with a rising impulse, but dimly felt before, to express herself. And daily her beauty brightened into unwonted brilliancy and expressed itself in the softened grace and languor of her attitudes.

She never for a moment left Aytoun’s thoughts, which were set invincibly in the one direction. By day, he thought

of her, but by night, her eyes haunted him, and he could only dream.

One night Helen arranged a party to sail across the bay, in a little launch her husband had given her the summer before to satisfy a whim she had of spending long hours of solitude upon the water. She had invited Mrs. Lindsay and her husband, who was paying his wife a brief visit in Newport, and the Bertrams who were staying with them. It was understood that the boat should leave them at the landing at the foot of the hill overlooking the bay on which Mrs. Lindsay's new house had been built. Helen had asked Aytoun to join them. They all dined together early, and then after a short drive through the dusk of the wooded streets from Helen's house to the wharf, they set out across the bay.

It was dark at first before the moon arose, and although they talked together merrily for a while, the subduing influ-

ence of the softly enveloping night took possession of them, and they soon separated, settling themselves with rugs and cushions in different parts of the boat. Aytoun and Helen, who were left alone in the stern, could hear the murmur of their voices and see the gleam of a light dress in the darkness, and the glowing tips of the men's cigars.

It was very still, there was no sound but the gentle lapping of the water which gleamed blackly around them like a mirror of tarnished silver. The lights of the town shone dimly in the distance, and a scarcely perceptible breeze blew softly about their faces. They were discussing the old topic, trying to determine once more that invisible boundary which divides the good from evil in human affection. They were laughing lightly, dreading to apply their floating metaphors and fancies to themselves.

"The reward is for those who believe in the good," said Helen, "and do not

look for evil. We find what we seek for after all."

"Not lack of belief," Aytoun replied, "but of reason. Blessed are those who can see. It is all black and white with most people. They cannot see that delicious country which lies between, a paradise of pearl gray, such a happy country! don't you think so, *chère amie*?"

"What would you call it?" asked Helen. "Not all spirit, not all mind. That country is too near the heart."

"Bounded by the equator, we will say, lit, but not burned, by the sun, the lower latitudes of the soul. Shall we survey it?"

"Not to the end, I fear," she answered sadly.

"Not to the end? Come, answer truly. Think of the great friendships of the world. Would George Sand have been George Sand without Alfred de Musset and Chopin?"

She thought a moment.

"No," she said, "I do not think she would."

"Ah," he exclaimed, "you are brave enough to admit it. Is there a different law for others less great than she."

"I do not know," she answered. "I cannot think it out. I can only feel that the best rule for all of us is to be loyal to our own type; to avoid anything which seems to us destructive—besides, the world has grown older since that tropic noon day in which she lived, wiser, too, I think."

"Grown older, dear,"—the word dropped unconsciously from his lips—"but not outgrown the essence of its life, not old enough to repeal its own laws—you have everything on your side but Nature."

"Nature," said Helen, "is made to be subdued; there is more joy in victory than in defeat."

Aytoun looked at her curiously, half doubting, half believing.

She turned towards him impulsively. "Ah," she said, "I know what you would say, but listen—friendship, sympathy, sentiment, call it what you will, is the very soul of all human relationships, of parent and child, sister and brother, husband and wife, even of lovers in their madness. Without it all the relations of family are a grinding chain, and love itself a degradation."

Long afterwards, when many disillusionments and the sadness of departed youth had dimmed his memories, Aytoun could hear the earnest accents of her voice coming to him out of the night, could hear once more the quiet murmur of the sea, the voice of the sighing breeze.

"Love," she said, and the word fell slowly, reverently from her lips, "one word! our language is too poor, only one, for feelings as remote as the very essences of good and evil. It is the cause of most of the tragedies of this world."

"Who shall express it?" he said, wondering at her wisdom, and gazing through the dim star light at her face. Now at last her words seemed to express the thoughts there written and her lips to answer to those dreaming eyes.

The sweet voice went on.

"Passion," she said, "the desire of self, I have seen it, but never quite understood it. One-half of the great circle of emotions which are all called Love, it is the last with us if, indeed, we ever traverse it, it is the first with you; but the other half, how many know it; when we love to love instead of to be loved, and when self dies. Do you understand it?"

"I think so," he slowly answered. "I will try."

"That love, I believe," and she spoke quite clearly now and firmly, "is a flower which bears no poison in its petals, we may gather and wear it any-

where and any time with tears of gratitude."

The young moon had risen at last and hung like a silver feather in the sky, a sudden mist obscured the shore, and light clouds floated among the stars. As Helen and Aytoun were borne noiselessly along, in their light vessel through the still water, they could see the stars and clouds reflected in its placid surface, while the mist which hung over the shore, obscuring every semblance of the earth, seemed to float like the clouds, and the reflected stars to be the sisters of those above. Standing in the stern of the boat, they seemed themselves to be borne through space, and lost for a moment consciousness of earthly things. Next Aytoun was Helen's face in its pale beauty, her eyes shining strangely, filled with the mystery of the night.

"Ah, I do understand!" he said devoutly.

They turned to one another with a long look of exceeding peace, and to Helen the mists through which she sailed were the very essence of her life-long dream.

The moon rose higher and it grew late. Helen left her guests at the landing place, whence they departed with the laughter and the words of their good-night breaking clearly upon the silence, and with the flutter of lace skirts in the lights streaming through the windows, and then the boat went on and Aytoun and Helen were left alone.

The silence surrounded them with its compelling charm and the magic of the night once more enfolded them. There seemed to be no barrier, no distance between them in this mysterious intimacy of the soul. Helen had a strange impression as of a wandering far within endless undiscovered caves. They spoke each other's thoughts and trembled as they did so. Perhaps they

knew it could not last. But for the moment the great angels of love and death hovered over them and touched them not, enwrapping them only with the dim sense of the mortality of their joy, which was to them as the passing fragrance of a flower, the resolving rhythms of a song, presaging silence; but for the moment they were together—on the sea, among the stars! alone.

"How have I lived so long without you?" he asked her passionately.

Her eyes shone strangely near him, he looked once more, a sudden madness swept over his senses; slowly he bent toward those mysterious eyes, so long the comrades of his dreams. They did not turn away and suddenly his lips met hers in a long moment of mortal sweetness, of ecstasy which seemed like death.

The sweet eyes closed, and Helen half unconscious sank upon her knees by the side of the boat.

"Helen, Helen," he begged her wildly, "Oh, forgive me!"

But as he said it, and as she listened through the dimness of her fainting senses, they knew their dream was over, their happiness was dead.

Chapter X.



WHEN Aytoun went to see Mrs. Rivington the next day, she refused to see him. She kept an engagement for a dinner which she had made some weeks before, mechanically answering the questions her neighbor put to her, seeing the lights flicker before her eyes with a sense of painful unreality, and then came home as early as she could, longing to be alone.

She found a note from Aytoun on her return, and took it with her to her room.

All day the whirl of emotion had been so blinding that she scarcely knew whether it was joy or pain which she was enduring. She had only the sensation of having suddenly been drawn into the rapids, of losing her foot-hold,

but her mind, which was usually so clear, and detached, so capable of reflective comment upon her own thoughts and actions warned her that she would soon be compelled to be the inexorable judge of herself, to issue the decree of her future in the court of her own soul.

Sitting alone with Aytoun's letter before her, she knew that the moment of decision had come. She read and re-read it, pausing over every word.

"You have refused to see me," it began, "I cannot pretend to be surprised, and yet I must make one appeal to your mercy. I have spent the night and day in a strange torment of ecstasy and utter misery.

"I need not protest, but you know that I am wholly yours, to do with as you choose.

"It is inconceivable to me that I should ever do anything to cause you an instant's pain, and if that moment which fills my whole soul with its glory must be the only such in my life's history—let it be so—I will bridle my tongue also and only speak to you as I have done hitherto, as to my best and dearest friend, only, I implore you, do

not send me out of your life. I can scarcely breathe since I left your door this afternoon for fear of what that white, stern soul of yours is thinking. Try to trust me, dearest; believe in me.

"I must wait all through this night before I can hope for a word. For God's sake do not delay."

P. A.

It was very still, the stillness of midnight. All the lights were extinguished except Helen's one lamp, which shone out upon the soft darkness of the encircling trees. She looked about her room. The familiar objects seemed to be conscious of the part they were playing in her history, the silence and the shadows were full of the meaning of the moments as they passed; a mild air from the sea blew in through the window, and stirred the loose hair upon her brow. She bent over her desk and laid her cheek upon the letter, her heart filled with a rising tide of joy, which overflowed in broken words of tenderness from her lips. She was

proud of every precious word, and the knowledge of his love, this love for the first time so passionately desired, sank into the empty places in her deepest heart. So she sat, her eyes closed, her face upon the letter in a trance of joy, not forgetting, not unconscious of the persistent reasoning self she knew would claim her soon, granting to her heart a brief respite, a fleeting moment of breath, of life, of happiness, and as she sat there motionless, the mysterious sounds of the night, the faint rustling of the leaves, the minute, unnamable stirs and murmurs in the deep stillness made little ineffaceable marks upon her consciousness.

She rose and began to walk up and down the length of her room, her hands clasped behind her. Gradually her brain became clear, and with her active consciousness she began to suffer cruelly. She tried to think it out, to define to herself just where she stood, and

every step she took in the path her reason led her, brought to her a torture she had never before imagined. In the solitude of the night she stood at last face to face with that unveiled tragedy of life which she had escaped till now. Feeling it in her deepest soul, she had persisted in her attitude of aloofness, still denied that life was serious, or held realities of commanding joy or of corroding inescapable agony; but now the vision was before her, she could not escape it, and the way in which it touched her, arresting her steps, commanding her to silence, was in her hopeless inability to force her mind over the barrier which stood between herself and happiness. She could not make it right. Unconsciously now, she continued her walk up and down her room, pressing her temples with her clasped hands, wringing them some times unconsciously in her fight with herself. Deeply imbedded in the very

foundations of her nature, her introspective mind discovered an unconquerable, ineradicable revolt against the desire of continuing this friendship which was friendship no longer. Her gratitude for her husband's care of her, which had protected her from misfortune and surrounded her with indulgence and luxury, bound her struggling, sighing, weeping with an unbreakable chain, and her stainless sense of personal honor blazed with a tyrannical demand for obedience like the sword of the angel before the gate of her paradise. If her high belief in the perfectibility of human friendship had led her rejoicing through the first stages of her happy journey, her strict detached intelligence told her exactly where she had finally arrived, and the completeness and perfection of this friendship warned her that the passion into which it was merging was a like full orb, perfect and tyrannical. In vain she tried to per-

suade herself that she could forget the kiss which had waked them from their dreams, this one sin which had barred the gates against them. She tried to cheat her mind with sophistries, to lull it to sleep with fancies, "A rose may close and be a bud again," she thought; "it shall. We will forget this one, sad error, ignore it, be only friends again. If we try, we can; surely such a friendship is worth some sacrifice!" Then the sinking ecstasy of that remembered moment would return, thrilling with sudden pain to the very tips of her fingers, and her eyes would close while the feeling of death-like faintness dimmed her brain. Then she would wake once more to her suffering, to the bitter, irrevocable truth. She saw that she could no longer misname this blissful friendship which had absorbed her heart and mind for all those happy months. It was love, she knew—"love," she whispered breathlessly to her solitude. If she had

loved him less, or loved before, the decision of those midnight hours might have been otherwise, but struggle, weep as she might, she could only see that love had come—and come too late.

Sometimes the weakness of her grief would overcome her, and she would sink upon her bed and weep her heart out, but never for one moment could she deceive herself into believing that she had the smallest right to see Aytoun again, to take one step further in this path now that she knew where it was leading.

Did Helen know quite what she was doing in giving stern refusal to her desire for happiness? Perhaps not. She was unversed in pain, and had only just begun her journey of sorrow. She was only answering as a ship answers its helm, to the invincible principle which governed her nature.

When the morning came, the struggle of her soul which had swayed all

night between the two opposing forces of the moral world, 'twixt duty and desire, was over. She wrote mechanically a note of farewell to Aytoun, short, almost cruel in its brevity, expressing scarcely a trace of the agony she had traversed, and then she threw herself upon her bed, and fell into the deep sleep of physical exhaustion.

The days which followed brought Helen no respite from her pain. The strain of thought fixed invincibly upon the one point of suffering, and resolve did not for one moment relax its hold. In all the outward actions of her life, when she spoke of other things, when she heard almost with a feeling of mockery the sound of her own light words and laughter, this deep preoccupation persisted with its imperious command of pain. At night the attitude of her enslaved and tortured brain remained unchanged, for when she awoke

she was conscious of no break in her thoughts, and the name which in despair or love had left her lips in the night's solitude when sleep finally claimed her, seemed to float above them when she awoke. The grip of physical pain never left her heart, and sometimes the mental strain and bodily torture taxed her resistance almost to the breaking point. Sometimes in the little acts of her daily life a sudden blur would dim her eyes, her hands would tremble as she wrote; then at clearer moments when some insistent need of mental activity had roused her brain, these mists of suffering would clear away, and she would find herself oftenest alone at night face to face again with the embodied tragedy which was destroying her.

She had not believed herself capable of such suffering, and she who had longed to live, spoke bitterly to her own heart, asking if she were at last content.

She was alive indeed to the remotest mysteries of her being.

Hopeless of peace, she threw herself into the crowding occupations of her outward life seeking for physical exhaustion. In the hot days of August she moved through the succeeding scenes of the heartless drama of her days, hypnotized by the force of her unbreakable will into a curious mechanical obedience to outward forms. Her mind was a dim turmoil whirling to the rhythm of the pain which throbbed through her senses. The white dust of the roads, the heavy embowering trees, sounds of broken laughter, dance music, and a tourbillion of summer gauze rainbow colored, kaleidoscopic, swept changefully across her consciousness.

Thus days, even weeks, passed by.

It was the middle of August and as General Rivington, had returned from his yachting, she had no time to herself

except the few exhausted moments which were hers at night.

In the afternoon she drove with her husband, sometimes stopping at the Polo field, sometimes driving out past the cliffs into the quieter country, and she was grateful for these hours of silence. The affection she had always borne her husband seemed to be strengthened under the mute appeal of her heart for sympathy and compassion. Her self reproach at times was very bitter, and she longed deeply for the luxury of confession and of punishment. Often in these long drives, a rising impulse to ease her own pain would tempt her strongly, but she would always check it, realizing that she was already doing her utmost of loyalty in her refusal to see Aytoun again, and believing that she had no right to cause her husband useless distress.

There were times when in the ebb of the outward excitement with which her

days were full, her face would reveal the secret and daily exhaustion of her vitality. It showed itself in an indescribable spiritualizing of her features, which was hardly illness or emaciation, but which changed the radiating beauty of her perfect health into something mysterious, fragile and deeply alluring. In these days of her own mortal pain, Helen was more passionately loved and lovable than ever before in her life, and became the moving center of the changing life about her. Her personality was for the moment the ruling influence in an atmosphere mysteriously charged with the intense magnetism of her vitality, brought to its completest potentiality by the force of her own suffering. She was amazed at this tide of interest, of passionate occupation with herself, which seemed to set towards her, and gave herself up to it with a bitter gratitude half mockery, half despair.

Every day she would be the foremost

figure of some gay party when she would sit in her dainty dress on the box seat of some coach, the very figure of frivolity and fashion, beautiful, insolent, and admired. Every night in her diamonds and her tulle, she would dance, laughing a little recklessly, never resting, while she wondered at her own endurance, and then she would drive home in silence, her face sunk upon the cushions of her carriage, her hands clasped over that never ceasing pain at her heart, her breath coming shortly, heavily in the depth of her pain. "Philip, Philip, oh! Philip," she would sigh, repeating his name over and over in her solitude, with all the words which were the very golden coinage of her heart, unspent, unspoken except thus in her despair.

Chapter XI.

III ELEN wondered sometimes how it could be possible that her husband could be unconscious of the intense preoccupation of her mind.

General Rivington was very happy at Newport; its streets for him were filled with associations. Its formal life with its invariable elegance, its precision, pleased his taste, and it delighted him to see his young wife moving before him in the apparent enjoyment of the position he had given her and the beauty of which he was so proud. It pleased him to order their life on a somewhat more lavish scale than when in town. He occupied himself with the details of their weekly dinners whose perfection had for years been a standard of envy and imitation, and which it was an inter-

est and pride for him to continue. He began his day with a consultation with the cook, an important person who had been for years in his service, and with whom Helen never attempted to interfere. Then he would walk into town, a mild constitutional of a mile and a half, and smoke his cigar with one or another of his friends at the Casino, or at the Reading Room.

At the Casino during the days of the tennis tournament Helen would join him, and they would drive together in her phaeton to their luncheon at home, or abroad. General Rivington had so long been a part of the life at Newport that he was unconscious of any lack of naturalness in its society. He was at home among its formalities, of which he was himself a part. He was accustomed, however, to inveigh against the curt impertinence of the younger men, and asked with indignation by

whose authority insolence had been established, as the first principle of good manners.

One morning, as often happened, he met his friend Tom Ripley, as he turned out of his gate, and adjusting his long step to the somewhat shorter one of his companion they strolled off towards the town. It was a clear morning, the sun shone brightly upon Tom Ripley's smoothly shaven, handsome face and brought out the old ivory tones in his skin, the lines about the pale blue eyes. General Rivington had some trouble in keeping step with his friend, whose movements were slow, and whose figure was undoubtedly a little bent. "Upon my word," said General Rivington to himself, "Tom is getting old." He straightened his shoulders as he walked beside his friend, "and I am two years older than he," he thought with pride. "It is not the years which tell."

A landau with a party of sight seeing strangers rolled slowly by, the occupants staring openly.

"I wonder who those two distinguished old men are," a clear voice said. "You never see such old men anywhere but in Newport."

General Rivington and Ripley looked at each other.

"Old! yes, I suppose we are," said General Rivington, "but upon my word I wouldn't exchange with any of those young cubs at the Casino—I should like to give them a lesson in manners."

"You would have your trouble for your pains," replied his friend. "They know more than you do."

"Yes, of course, of course they do, but upon my word it makes my blood boil sometimes;" General Rivington struck his stick sharply upon the sidewalk. "Their insolence is beyond belief!—this country is not what it was, the race of American gentlemen is dying out."

"Oh ! come, come," said Ripley, "you are a little hard."

"Not a bit of it," General Rivington insisted ; "if I had a son I should see to it that he should remember some things my father never permitted me to forget, and which these young men never seem to have thought of."

"What for instance," said Ripley, agreeing in his heart, but enjoying his friend's indignation.

"Patriotism, man !" answered General Rivington, irately. "They haven't an idea of such a thing ; it's as old fashioned to their minds as the wigs of our grandfathers."

"True, true," said Ripley with conviction.

"And respect for women, and courtesy for their elders and betters," continued General Rivington. "Have you seen the least indication that they know what good manners mean."

They walked on towards the Casino.

A bright faced girl drove by in a russet wagon, flicking her ponies skillfully, while she smiled and nodded to Ripley.

"That's a fine girl of yours," said Rivington.

"Yes, my youngest;" replied Ripley, with pride. "She's taller than I am."

"Drives awfully well, too," said General Rivington. "I'll admit the girls are better. It's a pity! The men aren't fit to tie their shoe strings."

As they neared the Casino, carriages, carts and occasional horsemen passed incessantly, and Gen. Rivington and Ripley with a scrupulous courtesy frequently raised their hats in greeting to smiling women in light gowns and flowered hats, who bowed to them from under their lace parasols as they drove by.

They went into the club and sat down, taking their places in the line of men in the embowered balcony above the Casino door, and looking down up-

on the crowd which was gathering around a coach about to start. A number of men went out leaving two who were apparently immersed in conversation at the end of the porch opposite to where General Rivington and Ripley sat quietly with their cigars.

The taller of the two, whose name was Seton, was dressed in traveling tweed, and surveyed the scene below him with the undisguised interest of a new comer, noting the familiar and the unfamiliar faces in the crowd of gayly dressed people, gathered about the coach.

He was long limbed and slender, his hat was pushed back from his brown hair, his eyes were alert, his nose impertinent, the shape of his face and the curve of his lips, young and poetically classic. He held a cigarette loosely in his mouth, his voice was crisp and high pitched, but vigorous.

The other was Tom Cary, who ac-

cording to his invariable habit was spending August in Newport. His melancholy blue eyes were half shut, he leaned languidly over the balcony, replying to his friend's questions his words dropping shortly from his lips, which were set in an expression of unmoved indifference, under his drooping blond moustache.

"Otis sits his box very well, doesn't he, Cary? I never saw such a man. He drives as well as if he had owned horses for years. Best all around sport I ever saw. Somebody must be late, he looks rather cross—there is Mrs. Bertram. By Jove! she is prettier than ever,—Isn't she going?"

"No, we took the coach yesterday together—don't know who's got it. Not much of a crowd. It's an off day."

"Yes, I should think so, never saw such a set."

A victoria drove up rapidly, and a very pretty woman making her way

among the crowd mounted hurriedly to the box seat.

"Upon my word," said Seton sitting forward, "There's Mabel Perkins, in Newport! That woman has nerve—I'd no idea she'd try it so soon—how is she getting on?"

"Not a woman has spoken to her as yet."

"Of course they haven't, she might have known. I can't think how she could have made such a mistake—she's usually cleverer than that."

"Why! didn't you know? the old man has made a pile."

"Another pile, you mean."

"Yes, he's simply drowned in money—ugh, it makes me sick."

"Is he here?" asked Cary.

"Of course not, she isn't quite such a fool as that."

"Fool?—she isn't a fool at all—She's had to take that coach and fill it up with duffers, but never mind she'll

have four or five hours with Otis and by the time she gets back, he'll know who she is."

"The women are all down on her, she's got a long row to hoe before she gets there. It's astonishing how mean they are—the lot of them."

"Well no wonder they hate her," said Seton, "she can give them all points on looks, and that's the whole business after all. Deliver me from a woman who talks."

During this conversation Mrs. Perkins settled herself on the box seat of the coach, and tilted her parasol over her frizzy yellow head. Her face was smooth and round, with a Greuze-like softness of outline and a peachy skin. She lifted her chin and looked down from under her dropped eyelids upon the crowd of staring people about the coach with a cool insolence which matched their own, her slight figure in its faultless dress held gracefully erect,

her tiny feet in their smart shoes advanced a trifle.

"Upon my word!" said Seton, between his teeth. "She looks cool, she knows I'm here too,"—he brought his hand down on the edge of the balcony. "By all that's holy, I'd change that expression for you, my lady, if I were here for more than a minute—but only over Sunday! A man's got to have time." He turned towards his friend, "By Jove that woman is a stunner. Did you see that foot? there isn't another like it in the place;" his eyes were alit, his voice eager.

"Small good will it do her," grumbled his companion, who was biting his mustache.

"Why! what's the matter with you, Cary, you look rusty. You know she's the best looking woman here." Cary looked down and kept silent. Seton eyed him with a sudden glance of intelligence.

"I believe you have tried it on," he said with conviction.

The other looked up resentfully.

"Well," he said, "didn't you tell me to."

"I told you I had," said Seton with cool impertinence, "but I didn't advise you to follow my example."

"Confound your conceit," growled Cary, flushing red.

"So she wouldn't have it?" laughed Seton, "what did she say?"

"Oh, she took the high moral ground, said I didn't understand her, that I might kiss her hand if I liked."

"Oh, her hand."

"Yes, said she hadn't permitted anything else since her marriage."

"Good heavens, how she has wasted her time!"

"She lied, of course," said Cary, looking sharply at Seton, who raised his eyebrows and whistled softly through his teeth.

Cary rose with an impatient movement, and seated himself on the edge of the balcony.

"They are all liars, and there's no such thing as principles if they fancy a man. Look at that beautiful Mrs. Livingston."

"What!" said Seton "that lily of purity. You don't mean to say she's joined the great majority — who's the man? By Jove, I shouldn't mind changing places with him."

"Oh, nobody you know; Aytoun, an artist. Been up here painting Mrs. Lindsay's portrait. He and Mrs. Livingston have been simply inseparable."

"You don't mean it? What does she want with him? Why doesn't she stick to her own set."

"Don't ask me. You never know when the fancy will take them. He's a good looking chap; I suppose she likes him."

Their voices had become louder as

they continued. The noise and confusion which drowned their conversation before, had subsided with the departure of the coach and the scattering of the crowd.

General Rivington and Ripley had heard the last of their remarks about Mrs. Perkins, and had turned their backs.

"Young ruffians," General Rivington had exclaimed angrily. "What was I saying, Ripley? Tell me what you think of that sort of a conversation in a public place."

"Oh, well," replied Ripley, "they might have said worse things," but General Rivington moved his chair noisily, quite failing to attract the attention of the offenders, and puffed angrily at his cigar.

Suddenly he caught his wife's name and Ripley saw the blood rush to his face. He rose to his feet. Ripley also had heard quite distinctly, and put a detaining hand upon his arm.

"Rivington," he said earnestly, "Rivington—for heaven's sake don't make a fool of yourself."

General Rivington stood for a moment erect, his hands clenched over his stick—his eyes afire, thinking rapidly even in his anger. "I have been away," he thought, "what knowledge have I with which to refute these lies. I shall defend her but not in the dark," as he hesitated with his friend's hand upon his arm, the two men rose carelessly without a glance in their direction, and left the balcony. General Rivington shut his lips.

"Thank you, Tom," he said, "I shall settle with these cubs later. You are right, this is not the time." They went down stairs in silence.

"Good morning," General Rivington said abruptly at the door. "Good morning, Tom."

Ripley watched him as he walked away.

Chapter XII.

ENERAL RIVINGTON did not see his wife until they met at the door to drive to their dinner. Although his mood of anger had persisted during the day, he did not deem it wise to discuss a subject of such importance during the brief moment of their drive, but when they returned and Helen had put her foot upon the stairs, and had bidden him good-night he interrupted her progress with a gravely detaining word.

"Helen," he said, "I must speak with you a moment."

She followed him into the library ; a single light was burning dimly, and the room was filled with the diffused white radiance of the summer night. She stood quietly by the table at which her

husband had taken his accustomed seat, —pale in her white dress—her cloak falling away from her bare shoulders. Her eyes were startled, but not afraid.

General Rivington took up a paper knife which lay on the table, and turned it nervously in his hand.

"Helen," he said in a voice which she had never heard, "it is very painful;" he paused, and then went on rapidly, "I overheard your name to-day at the club, spoken in connection with a man whom I myself have never seen but once, but whom you must have often seen during my absence. The words used were very unpleasant for me to hear, if not compromising to yourself; I must defend you and myself, and to do this I must not be left in ignorance."

"If you will tell me;" began his wife, in a deep and perfectly quiet voice —

"Understand me," he interrupted; I

do not wish to pry into your secrets—I have left you every liberty, have I not?"

"Absolute liberty," she answered.

"You do not need to be told that I trusted you. It is intolerable to me to question you, to remind you of what you owe to your own dignity and mine."

She threw up her head, "Ah," she said, "I do not deserve this. Have I ever needed such a lesson?"

"If what I heard to-day has a foundation in truth, you do." He looked at her searchingly.

She hesitated, her lips trembling, and he noticed for the first time the pallor of her face, and was startled to see how thin she had grown. A sudden pain and pity for her sharpened his anger intolerably, as he realized that something indeed had entered into her life to change her so.

"Answer me;" he insisted sternly. She still hesitated, confused between

her desire to confess her unhappiness, and the pride of her conscious innocence. Her husband still held his commanding gaze fixed upon her.

"I do not need your blame, but your sympathy; if you only knew!"

"It is not true? Then why ask for pity." His voice was dry and hard.

"It is not true," she answered more firmly in reply to the continued cruelty of his manner. "Certainly not true that I have forgotten what I owe to you—except"—and here her rigid instinct of truth arrested her, she hesitated, and then began to speak falteringly. "Oh, listen, listen," she exclaimed, throwing out her hands appealingly. "I have not done wrong, I think, not very wrong—" she stopped again. "Oh, how can I tell you?"

"You must," he replied, but even as he spoke sternly and unrelentingly he began to realize her suffering, to steel himself against it.

"I must go back a little," she said. "I was very young when you married me, and I have not been unhappy. Oh, believe me—not unhappy."

"You did not seem so," he replied.

"I was not, and you have been very kind to me, but we must all live, must we not? I thought I had, when I married you, else I never should have consented. I thought the danger was over. I thought I might add to your happiness—by my affection and gratitude, make some return for all you did for me." She paused again, looking to him for a little help in her painful speech, but he was silent. "The danger was not over," she continued; "for after a while I saw that I had not known what it was to live—and I was lonely sometimes;—you thought, I know, that you were giving me all I desired in granting me so much liberty, but oh, I grew so tired of all that empty life! I was very lonely, but I believed that I was

cold, as they all think me, and tried to forget it, and then —”

“Well?”

“I had known Mr. Aytoun years ago;” she said, speaking the name simply. “He understood me—interested me, I did not think our friendship could be wrong—I never knew anyone so well in all my life.” She paused and turned away her head. For a fleeting moment, standing there as she did before her husband, the peace of that friendship, in which she had alone known happiness, absorbed her, and her face softened into a momentary gleam of joy.

General Rivington watched her, suffering deeply, and a dumb jealousy such as he had never before experienced took possession of him.

“I did not think it was wrong,” she repeated, “and I was happy in my ignorance until,—she hesitated again—I saw where we had come—and then, Oh!

believe me, believe me," she appealed to him, "I have tried to do right, I have refused to see him, I have"—

"When was this?" he asked her. "Let me understand quite clearly. You saw Mr. Aytoun constantly while I was away?"

"Yes," she answered; "I think so—very often."

"And as soon as you discovered;" General Rivington found it difficult to continue. "You have nothing more to tell me?" He dropped his eyes from her frank gaze.

"Oh, how can you," she exclaimed bitterly, the blood rushing to her face and then leaving it pale again. "Look at me!—yes, I love this man, as much, I think, as he loves me, but I have had the strength to bid him good-bye. I have not sinned, no, except in the recognition of this love, which is not stronger than my will—oh, try to be sorry for me," she said in her deep

voice. "Love comes once in all our lives, I think, and then we live—in joy or pain; it is nothing but suffering to me."

General Rivington closed his eyes for a moment to shut away the sight of his wife's face, steeling his heart against her suffering, unable in his anger, to think of her youth, her loneliness, her pain.

She stood there her hands clasped tightly over her heart, her eyes dark, her pale lips drawn with suffering, lonely, except for his sympathy, his affection. For a moment he almost yielded to the impulse to forgive her freely, to tell her how he honored her for her bravery, for he did understand and believe her wholly, but he was not strong enough. He rose from his chair.

"I quite believe all you say—your explanation is sufficient—you have not transgressed the letter of the law, that is quite evident. We will not speak

of this again. You are probably tired. Good night."

Helen looked at him a moment, his tall figure held rigidly erect, noting hopelessly the stern passivity of his face, and then she turned and slowly traversed the length of the great room, pale and stately in her white dress, whose satin murmured on the floor, the only sound in the deep stillness. At the door she stopped and turned towards her husband with a half checked gesture of appeal, but his attitude was still rigidly unmoved, and she went out leaving him alone.

General Rivington resumed his seat at the table, his lips firmly set. He turned up the light, and drawing some writing materials about him, began to compose a letter of importance, which he had been considering for some days; but in the double activity of his mind, he was aware that the thought which he had deliberately attempted to banish to

sub-consciousness, was asserting itself. He saw his wife's face instinct with sadness, her appealing voice sounded in his ears.

His tardy love and pride in the young girl he had married had remained upon the surface of a nature long settled into the formality of habit, the coldness of continual good fortune. But now as he sat there alone in silence, a strange suffering rent and shook him. He dropped his pen and covered his face with his hands. Dreams of a youth long passed, his memory gave them up reluctantly, his own thwarted fancies and ideals and long forgotten sorrows and joys, moved before him in the stillness, rising again at this vision of a love, which was not for him. The sweetness of her nature, never wholly known till now, which he realized was not stirred for him, smote him with a bitter sense of longing and regret. Painful reluctant thoughts of the years

which lay between himself and Helen, clamored for recognition, and the remembrance of the solitary life she had led among the formal, empty gayeties to which he had abandoned her reproached him bitterly. Trying still to maintain his attitude of angry condemnation of his wife against the flood of sympathy which assailed him, there came a moment when he found he could no longer blame her. Alone, delivered over to this strange conflict with himself and his pride, his coldness suddenly gave way, and grief and love penetrated his heart, crusted with the composure of years; entered and filled it full.

He dropped his head in his hands.

"Too late," he groaned. "Too late."

But to Helen, sobbing alone in her room, abandoned to her suffering, her sorrow had never seemed so hopeless, her solitude so deserted.

Chapter XIII.

THE kiss which had awakened Helen and Aytoun from their dream of friendship had brought despair to her, but to Aytoun it was revolution. Past the temptations and expansions of early youth, Aytoun had maintained an unswerving loyalty to his ideal of life in art. At thirty-five he believed himself sincerely to be incapable of treachery to that faith.

But life has surprises for the strongest. At any moment some thunder-bolt from the electricities which sweep about us, may strike us into silence from which we awake the slaves of a new passion. Lightning will breed an infidelity in a compass.

When Aytoun first realized the danger which awaited him, his pride revolted

strongly, and his struggle, though brief, was bitter. Then, when the real similarity of their natures declared itself, charmed by Helen's mind, lulled into a false security by her frankness, her loyalty, he lent himself to her search for an ideal friendship. But if the real delicacy and spiritual cleanliness of his mind, which had its sources in the pure fountains of his American birth, had made him able to understand her deeply, that knowledge also taught him that she did not realize the danger they were braving. Divining the invincible decree of separation which she would issue if she knew she loved him, he put commands upon himself, and with his assisting will maintained the deception which gained for them both hours of unforgettable happiness, while they walked the road which they called friendship. For the first time the joy of life in life was his, for the first time he touched that unspent capital of sentiment, of self-forgetting

passion, which had so long lain hidden in his nature.

He had loved her first resentfully, fearing to lose his long-kept independence, jealous of his art; then gratefully, as the sweetness and delicacy of this woman's mind met his, the freshness of this poetic heart was revealed to him; then madly, as the ineffable beauty of the beloved woman took possession of him. Her eyes, the fragrance of her hair, her dress, enslaved his senses. There was a little curl which escaped upon her neck. There were soft mysteries of shadow about her eyes, indescribable ripples of expression about the deep corners of her mouth curved with happiness, which were impressed upon his brain as the sun upon eyes, which have gazed too long upon its intolerable light.

During the last weeks of their friendship, while he suffered those painful alternations of love and anger, which the

sight of her worldly life inflicted on him, he still doubted if she loved him, still held his own love captive to his will, but when her kiss revealed to him how much her heart was his, pride and reserve, and his life's loyalty to his art abdicated at last, leaving place but for one worship — the beloved woman.

On the night when they had sailed together through their dream to this blinding reality, he walked home in an ecstatic solitude, his soul expanding on the wings of the infinite within him to the infinite of the sky. His mood of joy was triumphant as the beauty of the moon which rode free of obscuring clouds in the deep vault of the night. He wandered solitary through the quiet streets of the town, and out upon the cliffs, and as he stood upon the shore alone with the limitless sky above him, the waves of the ocean rushing to his feet, obedient to the law of nature, he realized by the light of his own passion

that nature with its waves was throbbing through him, that he was a part of it, this love a law, his soul an eternity, infinite as the stars.

His surrender was deep and exultant, the surrender of the lover and the poet.

There were moments when fears of her stern self-judgment assailed him, but they were powerless as yet to hurt him, clothed upon as he was with the glory of a first love revealed, crowned with the knowledge of its full requital. He did not go to his rooms that night, but wandering far along the shore unconscious of whither his steps were leading, the dawn surprised him. He went to his studio, where he spent the hours of the morning in a deep slumber. When he awoke, his mind slowly and hesitatingly repossessed its happiness, for with that happiness the lurking fear which in the glories and the illuminations of the night had been powerless to hurt him,

grasped his heart with a painful clutch of apprehension.

He waited with impatience for the hour when Helen usually received him. The servant admitted him, and he made his way to the verandah, where the tea table stood ready in its accustomed place. His heart beat heavily—he braced his nerves in his effort at control. The servant appeared with a consciously passive face.

“Mrs. Rivington begs to be excused.”

Aytoun left the house in a daze of dismay. What he most feared had happened. She knew she loved him, and with that knowledge judged herself inexorably. He understood only too well the pure invincibility of her awakened conscience,—with a breathless fear he wrote the letter over which Helen in the solitude of that sleepless mid-night had fought the great fight of her life. In the morning her short note of farewell came.

"Do not hate me. It is best for us not to see each other again. I do not need to explain why to you who know! I do not blame you. I cannot write. God bless you. Good-bye."

H. R.

Aytoun was angry when he received this note, impatient of its brevity, which struck upon his throbbing nerves like a sudden blow. For a day he was stunned, unable to think clearly, and then he attempted to gather his thoughts together, to call to his aid all the force of his pride, and the self-control which never before had failed him. He found himself totally incapable to think upon any other subject, and realized with a bitter anger that he was no longer his own master. His chains galled him intolerably. Sometimes he shut himself up in his studio, painting furiously, then destroying the work which seemed worthless to him. Sometimes, he walked the street, driven by the caprices of his broken will, led by the desire to catch some glimpse of her.

For a week she went nowhere, and then one day he saw her. She drove past him on a coach with a laughing party of her friends. He paused at the roadside to let them pass. She bowed to him as they rolled by heavily with the sweep of the horses, the rattle of the harness; her salutation was slight and constrained, with a fleeting smile. He thought he heard her laugh as they passed on.

She had not left his thoughts for one waking moment since she had bidden him good-night on that fatal evening upon the water. "A week!" he thought, "was it only a week ago?" He had walked miles that day with the hope of deadening with physical fatigue this anguish which was driving him like a leaf before the wind.

And she—Aytoun was ashamed of the bitter anger and suspicion which rose within him at the sight of her thus driving past him, gay and laughing, appar-

ently forgetful of him. As he stood there in the dust while the coach disappeared around a curve in the road, he put his hand to his throat with a sudden sensation of choking. "She has been playing with me," he said between his teeth. "I have been a pastime for an idle hour." All his early suspicion of her, his hatred of this world of which she was part, swept over him again overpoweringly, blotting out his love with its tender passion, his knowledge of the nature he knew and loved so well. He walked homeward blindly, the victim of anger and jealousy, a thousand times worse than his despair.

And the next day he bitterly reproached himself for his suspicion of her, and called himself unworthy to love her. Sometimes at night during the hours when Helen alone in her room was thinking of him, he also in his solitude would be filled with a vision of her, and he would become mysteriously con-

scious of her suffering, filled with a certainty of her love. Sometimes in obedience to this unconscious summons, he would leave his room, and walking silently through the empty streets, would watch her solitary light. He fancied sometimes he saw her shadow, but the knowledge of her unhappiness was no fancy, but the mysterious omniscience of a love, which in spite of all barriers and conventions still united them.

As the days went on, the instinct to possess his own became intolerable. Aytoun had known women, but not love, and the virginity of heart which was his gave birth to wishes, strong as winged eagles, fresh as youth. The passion with which that kiss of his first love had enslaved him, he knew surpassed any of the fine rigors of labor, or the joy of success. Life had become Love, where it had been Art; with one thought he effaced ambition—even memory. But the virility of mind and

the unbreakable will by which he had conquered his art, was now the life and strength of his demand for happiness; his adoration of beauty was centralized into a passionate personal need.

If aided by his American instinct and led by his understanding of Helen's nature, he had at first accepted her terms, and consented to see out of her eyes, the revelation of her love for him gave sudden and overpowering strength to his desire for his own happiness. He began to think of her in a closer connection with his own wishes, to look from his own point of view.

Aytoun had lived for years a life in which the binding conventions and distinctions of society are first despised, and then forgotten. He had never himself gone contrary to any of its written or unwritten laws, but he had lived apart and had so long been unconscious of their existence that they now seemed vague and shadowy and had no terror

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consciousness of an emotion, which inundated thought.

He slept only from exhaustion, and often forgot to eat. He went irregularly to his rooms in the town, and wandering often far away among the cliffs, he found his way at nightfall to the lonely house which he had made his studio. There he awoke late one night from a sleep into which he had fallen, a dreamless sleep of utter fatigue, awoke with his brain suddenly clear.

A storm of wind and rain blew the dead leaves of the declining summer in gusts against the window, the dampness and the salt smell of the sea came in through the door which a blast had blown open. Aytoun shivered; he was faint from lack of food, and as he sat there alone in the darkness he trembled with the weakness of his shattered nerves. A totally unknown feeling of physical helplessness came over him, and his solitude oppressed him strange-

ly; but his brain suddenly regained its reflective power, his will once more responded to his call. "Come, come," he said aloud; "this is folly; worse than madness."

He rose, shut the door, and, lighting some candles, found some biscuits, made himself a drink and forced himself to reason, to formulate logically these thoughts, which had been beating through his brain with a maddening and futile repetition.

"First," he said, "it is clear this weak yielding is over. She either loves me or she does not. If she does she is suffering quite as much as I am. Why is it she refuses to see me? Her responsibility to her husband compels this sacrifice; the irresistible Puritan conviction that happiness is wrong is governing her."

He went on from point to point, forcing his mind to bare, unimaginative forms of thought:

"Swayed by this prejudice, obedient to her inherited leaning toward the duty which is martyrdom, she does not realize her responsibility to herself or to me. She either loves me completely and distrusts herself, or else she is tired of a caprice which threatens to become exacting, and is glad to be done with it."

The sight of her driving past him on the coach came back again with its unreasoning pang of anger and suspicion, and for the moment dwelt in his mind as proof of her heartlessness and insincerity, but he dismissed it quickly; the thought was intolerable. "No," he continued, "she is bound by the conventions of her life, her loyalty to what she believes to be her duty; but what are the facts? In preserving the vague and bloodless happiness of a man who never really loved her and in continuing this life, hollow, profitless and destroying, she is sacrificing the best

interests and possibilities of her own nature.

"Can I make her feel that she has duties also to herself and me? At least," he thought, "she may grant some clemency. I will accept any terms, wear any chains; slavery is better than death. I may at least persuade her to see me. I will try."

Aytoun sat down and began to write:

"It is three weeks since I received your short and cruel note. Did you know how cruel it was, or what wretched pain you have caused another by this edict of your implacable will? I cannot believe you did.

"I have borne the torture you have inflicted, until I have reached the end of my endurance. I may not see you, but at least you shall know what you are doing.

"Since you bade me good-night that evening, you have not for one waking instant left my thoughts. I am torn between belief in you and a doubt of your sincerity worse than any suffering I have ever imagined.

"In all those moments of our happy friendship, did you not dream I loved you? How could you fail to know it, so absolutely

absorbed as I was in your lightest word, your smallest movement. We were happy; you cannot deny it. I know you were happy, for your eyes told me so, your smile, the whole of your brightening beauty. At first you were pleased and flattered and amused, and then you were so grateful that I understood you, and gave you what with all that life has brought you you still longed for? Why should I not have understood you? Love has taught me the meaning of all your lovely face; the mysteries of your voice, the meaning of your every gesture are all clear to me. All my life I have loved beauty that I might understand you, and now I know you better than you do yourself. Your thoughts, those thoughts which you have brought to me, so modestly sometimes, did you not know I had been thinking them over, and over again for you, until you should apprehend them, realize your own nature, be yourself? And I watched, oh! how patiently, for the look in your eyes which they were made to wear. Your eyes are made for love, my darling, pure and proud as you are; you cannot forbid them their dreams and promises. Where did they come from, what ancestor spending his sick soul over the passions and the languors

of the east set those strange wonders in your face?—I waited for the look, I commanded it one day, do you remember? and you yielded it up to me. And then because I saw that you were dreaming of friendship and the loves of the mind and spirit, and as mind and spirit were yours too, I did my best to make them obedient to you, and you grew very happy, and your best self blossomed like a flower. I was so proud of what I, who was your bond slave, had done, and you did not half imagine how keen and fine and natural you became. You will be remembered for your loveliness, but if you will you can be powerful too, and know the excitement and the great joy which comes from the use of talent. With me, dearest, not without me. There is one crime which nature never forgives, the refusal to live—this is the unpardonable sin. You live now because you suffer, needlessly, cruelly, mistakenly, but when you cease to suffer you will no longer be you, you will live, your sweet lips will smile, your eyes will dream, but they will lie; they will be the mask of a murdered nature, and you, dear, are your own executioner. I do not need to be told why in the pride of your purity and your honor you have sent me from you, nor do

you need to tell me that it is because you love me wholly that you have done it. What, dear, do you not dare to see me? Ah, how I glorify and curse the moment which united only to separate us forever. Ah, love, love, be merciful. Is there no forgiveness, no retreat?

"Listen, my own, I love you wholly, every smallest inch of you, with every nerve; but as heaven hears me that passion is not stronger than my reverence for you. It is you, you, you I love, not myself.

"Why could it not go on as before? I will obey your slightest wish.

"I will not attempt to deny that I would take you away from this life you are leading, yes, with rapture, if you would consent to come; but I would not try to persuade you. You should come, if come at all, without one pang of conscience, without the remotest shadow of a doubt.

"But you will not come, you will not change,—let it be so. My love suffices. I will change for you. I will not give you one moment more to regret, no matter under what temptation. I will control myself absolutely, only trust me! You will never realize what it has cost me to write this letter. It is my last appeal."

Chapter XIV.

AYTOUN gave himself one week in which to await the answer to his letter, and then, should none come, he decided to leave Newport and America together. Three days passed, and he had received no answer. He found that if he had calculated his endurance, he had miscalculated his capacity for anger. On the afternoon of the fourth day after he had sent his letter to Helen, he shut himself grimly in his rooms, and awaited her answer. As the hours went by inexorably, the waves of his love rolled back upon him in an overwhelming flood of bitterness and rage, and every remembered thought of his own tenderness and trust in Helen turned now against him with a point of steel. What had been love and pity for her

was transformed into a mad, unreasoning wish to hurt her. What had been suspicion, seemed now to him only a prevision of the truth. "False, heartless," he called her bitterly, with a deep scorn of her, and deeper contempt for himself, that he should have been so deceived. He stood at his window, smoking nervously cigar after cigar, sometimes walking the room, sometimes sitting intentionally immovable with teeth shut and hands clasped tightly, in his fierce anger and resolve. "She never loved me!" he said, "I served to fill an empty moment in an idle day, I have been a dummy on which to hang her flimsy theories to be cast down, discarded at the first sign of life."

As his love had been complete, absorbing, so this bitterness turned it all to poison, and Aytoun suffered a terrible transformation of soul. What had been gentleness was now a desire for revenge. What had been the unspoiled poetry of

a simple, strong, and beauty loving nature, became cynicism, and an incurable pessimism.

He determined to see her.

"I will tell her to her face what I think of her, for one moment at least her pride if not her heart shall suffer. See her?—yes—but how?"

Aytoun turned hastily to his desk and looked over the invitations which lay there in an unopened pile. Among them he found one for that night. He noted the name, that of Mrs. Bertram, of whose balls he had heard Mrs. Lindsay speak in that conversation in the studio, which he had not forgotten, and whose worldliness had even then revolted him. He noticed the words "Bal Poudre" written in one corner, and in the other "very, very small dance." He laughed bitterly. "This will be very very smart then. She will not fail to be there." He looked at his watch. It was eight o'clock. He dressed and dined alone

at the club, and then walked rapidly down the street, out towards the cliffs, where Mrs. Bertram's beautiful house stood by the water's edge. There were lanterns on the marble gateposts, and looking beyond, he could see congregations of lights, blue, green and yellow, hung among the trees and scattered in groups along the grass. But it was early yet; there were no carriages in sight. Aytoun walked away, past the houses out among the rocks and sand, and there he sat nursing his anger, unspeakably wretched, impatient of the lagging moments as they passed.

It was midnight when he finally returned. The ball was in full progress. He did not go in but walked around among the shadows of the trees to the other side of the house where a porch with marble pillars faced the sea.

Terraces with balustrades and steps of marble, descended to the water's edge. In the distance groves of thickly grow-



ing trees, enclosed the brightness of the smooth stretches of lawn, where trees cut in fantastic old world shapes cast their strange shadows in the moonlight. Wreaths of roses fallen from the pillars lay along the steps, exhaling their odors in the air. Above the sound of the music and laughter from within, the voice of one bird singing among the trees struck with liquid sweetness upon the night. The regular sound of the waves came up from the sea, whence floated also a light vapor twisted and curling in strange shapes among the fantastic figures of the trees, like unbodied spirits drifting in a dream.

Through the open windows Aytoun could see the dancers swaying in the varying figures of the dance, in a maze of color, light and sound. The room was stately with marble pillars and full of the sweet dim grace of the Watteau panels, whose figures were repeated in the living women, lovely in their old

brocades and powdered hair, who moved before Aytoun's eyes like pictures living in a dream. Sometimes a maiden in quilted petticoat and rose-piled basket with her attendant shepherd would emerge from the brightness within into the moonlight of the porch, or a cavalier with feathered hat on arm would lift his lady's train over the low window sill, while on the terraces, or stepping slowly down the marble stairs, graceful figures met and greeted each other, joining in groups of blue and white and rose, and dividing again with the clear sound of floating laughter. Aytoun stood alone and watched the changing scene, the misery of his sleepless nights burning in his eyes, with a strange sense of unreality, born of the beauty of the night, and the madness of his own despair.

Suddenly one of the groups dissolved, and a woman in a dress of rose came toward him. He could see her as she

paused near where he stood. There were roses in her powdered hair, rouge and patches on her face. She stopped and clasped her hands together with a gesture of pain, breathing deeply in her solitude, as if she could bear no more. "Heaven help me," she sighed, "how can I bear it?"

It was Helen!

Aytoun heard her voice. He emerged from the shadow where he stood. She looked at him a moment, and then she turned as if to go. He caught her hand.

"You shall not go," he exclaimed in a husky voice; "how dare you make me suffer so? Ah! the misery, if you could know!"

She was silent, but her lips moved as she gazed at his white face.

"I wrote you," he said. "Did you receive the letter?"

The lips framed "Yes." He looked at her a moment with wondering anger in his eyes.

"You did not mean to answer it?"

She looked helplessly from side to side, and then up into his face, frightened at its expression of somber rage.

"Have you no mercy?" she said at last in a low voice, which broke, trembling as she forced herself to speak. "Can't you understand? I have tried to answer it. I could not—not yet—wait."

"Tell me," he insisted, "do you wish this to be the end—think—I shall give you no other chance—is it over? Shall I leave you?"

She was silent.

"Helen," he said slowly, "I believe, in spite of all your cruelty, that you love me; but if you can say you do not, I will go. Speak!—answer."

"Oh," she faltered, painfully, "it is too much. I cannot, cannot," she stopped, swaying, and he caught her in his arms. For one moment she rested there, blindly, half unconscious, while

he kissed her brow, her eyes, her lips, while he murmured, "No! you cannot, cannot say it."

But it was only for a moment. Then she tore herself away and stood apart from him, trembling, covering her face, and then she dropped her hands, clasping them together, and raising her eyes to his face.

"No!" she said, in a voice which was strangely clear, though faltering, "I do not love you."

He gazed at her incredulously.

"I do not believe you," he said. He came near her, taking her face in his hands and looking deep into her eyes, which bravely returned his gaze. "Say it again!" he insisted sternly. "You do not love me."

She made no reply.

"Answer," he cried, "are you woman? Are you real?"

"No," she answered. "It is over."

"Not a word," he said, "after all

these months! Did you never care for me?"

Still she was silent, wondering at her own courage, blindly holding to the untruth which should accomplish her sacrifice.

"You are a cruel woman," he said at last, each word falling with fatal distinctness from his white lips. "May heaven forgive you, for I never will."

There was an instant's silence, while Aytoun and Helen there in the moonlight of the music haunted night looked once more upon each other.

Then he grasped her wrists, throwing them from him with an almost brutal gesture, turned, and disappeared among the trees. And Helen, with heart of ice, passed falteringly up the marble steps, quite clear, quite conscious in the tragedy of her resolve, and joined the dancers on the floor.

Chapter XV.



 NINE months after Aytoun had left America Mrs. Rivington, accompanied by Mrs. Lindsay, arrived in Paris.

The winter had passed with the same monotonous gayety in which Helen had spent the ten years of her married life. No new sensations came to change the current of her thoughts, which as the months slipped by set strongly and more strongly towards Aytoun.

General Rivington had never again referred to the subject of their midnight's conversation in the library at Newport. Their relations resumed with no perceptible change the habits of courteous independence, mutual and unquestioned, which had characterized them from the first. If General Riving-

ton sometimes regretfully stifled a wish to speak openly to her of her trouble, she did not know it.

Undistracted from the ruling thought of her mind, left alone and uninvaded by any outside influence which could comprehend her, the thought of Aytoun became daily more and more absorbing.

She did not question or regret her action in cutting short all possibility of seeing him again. Not once during all the reveries and retrospects of the months that followed, did she admit to herself that she could have followed any other course, but she had not calculated the effect of the loneliness which pressed unrelentingly upon her now that Aytoun had returned to his old life, and gave no sign of his remembrance of her. Dwelling in the solitude of her mind upon every word and picture of him which remained to her, their friendship and the hours which she had spent in his

companionship assumed an ever growing importance.

Her outer life became an empty form; within she lived in his remembrance.

Little by little she lost her power over people, and her ability to assume an interest in what went on about her. The streams of her nature all flowed inward.

Her friends began to whisper of the change they saw in her, and General Rivington became at last anxiously apprehensive. Finally one day Mrs. Lindsay descended upon her in an indignant flurry of decision.

"You are pale and ill, my child," she said, "you must have a change! John has given in at last. I am going to Paris next week, and you are going with me. I shall see your husband myself. Now you needn't talk—you are going."

So it happened that when the chestnut trees were just breaking into blossom along the Champs Elysees, Helen

and her friend found themselves in Paris.

There for a fortnight, Helen lent herself to her friend's caprices, followed her to her conferences with her numerous dressmakers, and dined with her at the different restaurants with the acquaintances they met in numbers, fluttering up and down the Rue de la Paix in their search for clothes and jewels.

Mrs. Lindsay was in the highest spirits, and Helen followed her, trying to enjoy her gayety, endeavoring to be interested herself. But she was compelled to admit her efforts fruitless. The noise of the streets with their wheeling carriages, the atmosphere of unrest and excitement, tried her nerves unexpectedly. The details of shopping failed to amuse and only tired her, and instead, the thought which she had preferred to believe she could subdue kept rising, rising, to the surface of her mind, commanding her attention. She was in

Paris under the same sky, breathing the same air with Aytoun. "Philip! Philip Aytoun." This was the name, the one name, which Paris said to her. At any moment she might see him; in an hour, if she should write, he might be with her.

Again and yet again she found herself compelled to fight the same battle which she had won so hardly, while her strength was still unimpaired, before this winter of suffering had passed over her.

His success was on every lip. His name in the papers. His pictures were in the salon. She went often to see them, rashly abandoning herself to her persistent thought of him. She found she could no longer command the thought of a complete victory over herself, and she set herself hourly tasks to cheat her failing strength. She would resolve at each day's waking that she would not write that morning, and when

afternoon had come that she would not write till night. So she surmounted her days.

His words constantly recurred to her.

"You suffer now, but a time will come when you will suffer no more, and then you will no longer be you." These words now seemed prophetic to her of these days, when all the strength she possessed was used in subduing every impulse, since every impulse set towards him, and as her bodily strength declined, she realized that every quality of which her individuality was composed also suffered diminution, and as suffering was unique in her experience, so her vision was without prospective. No hilly retrospect of descents and painful but sure regainings of lost altitudes brought hope to Helen. It seemed to her that she was daily committing the suicide of herself. Dulled brain and weakened impulse drew the curtains of her soul; she only felt the darkness.

To break to pieces in a whirlpool of destruction, or to be ground slowly to nothingness on the rocks of renunciation, of self-nullification; this was the alternative which swayed her mind, while her instinct held firm; but she began to question the manner of her rigid dealing with herself, to blame herself that she had refused to see him and had failed to reply to his letter; what had so long seemed to her the single and inevitable course began now to appear crude, harsh and cruel.

Involuntarily her mind began to form sentences of excuse and explanation, and she composed many letters to Aytoun in her thoughts; but here in Paris where he might think she had followed him, pride with principle made a double barrier against desire.

Her manner toward her friend became more and more abstracted—some days she was almost irritable. There was a transparent look about her temples, and

the hollowness of her cheeks marred the pure line from chin to brow. Symptoms of a serious prostration of the nerves began to appear. She found herself unaccountably reluctant to perform the slightest outward act of life; conceived a strange aversion to see any of her friends; was a prey to a miserable feeling of apprehension, and slept a light and broken slumber, awakening at sunrise.

One morning Mrs. Lindsay, rising earlier than was her wont and wishing to speak with Helen about some project of the day, crossed the little salon which divided their rooms and knocked at her door. Hearing no answer and knowing how early it was her habit to awake, she knocked again more loudly, then yielding to a sudden feeling of alarm, she opened the door and entered the room.

Helen was lying motionless and whiter than her pillow; she was breathing, but her heart on which Mrs. Lind-

say laid her hand in terror was scarcely beating. She had fainted in her sleep.

Restoratives and stimulants revived her, but now, thoroughly alarmed, Mrs. Lindsay sent for a physician, who ordered them immediately out of Paris.

"She is too ill to bear the journey home," he said; "don't alarm her, but take a house in the country for a month at least. She must have complete rest."

Once assured of the necessity of a serious care of her friend, Mrs. Lindsay busied herself about the arrangements for their removal, and discovered a house near the forest of Fontainebleu, not far from Montigny, on the river Loing.

Helen was pleased when she was informed of this plan and smiled a little pale smile, as they drove together one morning in mid-May toward the Gare de Lyon.

The high pale blue of the sky, with the characteristic gray haze of Paris

stretched above the Arc. This sky had always seemed to Helen distant and insincere—an artificial heaven, not the sky which broods low over the meadows and the hills, rich in azure or in storms. The chestnut trees were in full bloom with their glimpses of lighted restaurants between, their surrounding streams of passing humanity. Yes, she was glad to escape for awhile, and wondered vaguely if in the country where she was going nature would consent to come near, would be generous and comforting.

The journey seemed long; the jolting of the train fatigued her. She was relieved when they arrived at the town of Fontainebleu and had exchanged the railway carriage for a landau, slow and lumbering, which carried them smoothly through the streets of the little city out into the country.

Helen and her friend leaned back in their seats and breathed the fresh air of spring.

Mrs. Lindsay laughed at the children who ran out from the cottages by the roadside, and threw them coins from her little gold purse. She was delighted with the novelty of her project, and enthusiastic in her promises of returning health to Helen.

"You will be strong," she said, "and well when I have done with you. Don't you worry, my dear, about anything. I'll take care of you."

Helen sat quietly enjoying the relief from the noise of Paris as they drove slowly along. Presently they entered the forest. A light cloud of pale green foliage floated in the tops of the taller trees, around whose trunks the moss, young and yellow, looked like fallen sunshine. The great oaks bore only their millions of reddish buds shining with sap, and the elms scattered the dead leaves of the past summer upon the path.

The grass still fresh and unscorched

by the heats of the summer, was green and strong.

The sun was shining through the branches, but little puffs of cool freshness stirred the air. Looking above, towards the light blue sky with its floating tufts of clouds, Helen delighted in the fine tracery of the branches still delicately distinct in their gauzelike veil of green, and listened to the chirpings and stirrings of the mating birds. As they drove on, the little innumerable stirrings and sounds in the great stillness soothed her unhappiness, quieted and purified her spirit.

"How good you are to me, Kate," she said turning to her friend. "I feel better already. It is delicious."

They emerged from the forest, driving through the white streets of Marlotte just as the sun's rays were striking on the window panes of the little houses which stood closely together by the roadside. The walls were of plaster,

freshly whitened, the red tiled roofs glowed under the horizontal rays of the sun, blossoming lilacs showed here and there over the walls, and garden flowers through the open gateways. Neatly dressed children splashed water at the pumps, or drove flocks of geese from under the horse's feet.

After they had left the village, they drove another half hour by the edge of the forest, and reached their destination just at night fall.

It was a curious but attractive house, restored and put in order by an old general, a favorite of the last empire, who had retired to the quiet of the country to pass his declining years, but had been drawn into a rash enthusiasm for Boulanger and had lost his fortune together with his hopes of a restoration of the empire. The house had been left for them quite unchanged, the owner being only too delighted at the chance to make a few economies.

Helen and Mrs. Lindsay were charmed and amused with their surroundings. Down stairs there was an office, the dining-room and kitchen, and two smaller rooms. Up stairs a large salon, smoking-room, and two bed rooms with smaller ones adjoining hung with Neapolitan shawls and arranged as dressing rooms. Two servants had been left in the house, who with Mrs. Lindsay's and Helen's two maids sufficed for their needs.

The house was situated near the river Loing, divided from it only by a garden, which adjoined an orchard filled with blossoms.

Helen opened the window and breathed the fresh air which blew across the meadows, which she could see dimly in the twilight on the other side of the stream. "Here," she thought, "I will learn to be happy, and grow strong once more."

After they had dined, they returned

again to the salon, as it was not yet warm enough to stay out of doors.

Helen was interested in this French interior and examined with curiosity the portraits, the vitrines with their old china, their relics and their medals, and was amused by the curious arrangement and disposition of the furniture. Her bed room, hung in dim blue-gray, pleased her. Its portraits of saints upon the walls, its little font for holy water above the bed and its priedieu gave to this quiet room in the silence of the surrounding trees, the reposefulness of a chapel.

But Mrs. Lindsay was delighted with the smoking-room, where the fallen idol of this military recluse looked boldly out from its frame surrounded by swords and rifles. Uniforms, humorously dismembered made the ornaments of chairs and curtains. She threw herself in a chair, whose back was adorned with a red coat with hanging empty sleeves.

She wound them about her waist, and laughed merrily.

Helen laughed herself. "How absurd!" she said.

And yet somehow this fantastic sentimentality jarred upon her, this strange expression of the ardor of a lost cause seemed too grotesquely pathetic. It was too appropriate, she thought.

Still laughing, she looked up at the portrait, but her thoughts turned upon the ignoble end of a career, and the love which sacrificed an empire. "It is wonderful," she said to her friend,— "Sublime folly perhaps after all."

"What do you mean," inquired Mrs. Lindsay, whose knowledge of history was elemental. "Tell me about it."

"Would you believe in a man who could give up what seemed to him the certainty of a throne for the love of a woman dying of consumption?"

"No, indeed, I would not," she shook her head decisively.

"You may," said Helen, pointing to the portrait, "for there he is."

"She probably got well, and lived to make him regret it."

"No, my dear, she died; and two months after he shot himself upon her grave."

Mrs. Lindsay's eyes looked around with astonishment, and her face sobered.

"Really?" she asked. "Then I suppose he must have cared."

She got up from her chair, and moved around the room. Helen threw herself on a sofa beside the fire. Mrs. Lindsay lighted a cigarette and came and sat beside her friend.

"How do you feel, not too tired?—It's nice here, isn't it?"

"No, dear, thank you; I am not tired."

"Then we'll talk a little."

There was a pause.

"Did you ever know one?" she asked, suddenly.

"Know who?" smiled Helen. "You are charmingly vague."

"Why! any man who cared for you, instead of for himself?"

Helen turned her head upon the cushions, and looked at her friend. She was tapping her foot nervously on the floor, her quick, black eyes full of an impatient indignation.

No word of confidence in regard to the deeper experiences of their lives had ever passed between these women, who had seen each other constantly for years. Helen thought a moment.

"Yes, and no," she said. "I have certainly known some who were convinced they cared."

"Yes, so have I; but they never convinced me."

"Perhaps you didn't wish to be."

"Ah," she said, "perhaps."

There was another pause. The murmur of the river came in through the window. The lamp, with its red shade,

cast a warm light upon Helen's face among the cushions, and shone upon the black braids of Mrs. Lindsay's hair. The room had an intimate air.

"And if you did," Helen's voice broke the silence, "would you give up anything because of it?"

"That's just it," said Mrs. Lindsay, sitting up straight in her chair. "There's always some terrible price to pay, and such indignation at the mere breath of hesitation."

"Yes, I know," said Helen. "They call it calculation with a fine scorn, and declare love is not love if it can count the cost."

"I know that contempt," said Mrs. Lindsay, "the contempt of the high-wayman when his victim hesitates to give up his money or his life."

Helen laughed a little.

"You put it strongly, I think."

"And what do they give us," Mrs.

Lindsay continued, indignantly; "nothing, when the chase is over."

Helen shook her head.

"You are not quite fair," she said, after all. "You have everything on earth you want, plenty of money, independence; I am sure John never refused you anything in all his life."

"No! nothing but his companionship," she said. "You know how it is. Our husbands give us everything but themselves. Did you ever see a man run after a street car?" she asked, whimsically. "He shouts and tears after it, would give his fortune rather than lose it; and when he gets it, he sits down calmly, takes out his paper, and begins to read."

They both laughed merrily.

"You are right," said Helen.

"Oh dear!" sighed Mrs. Lindsay; "is it really all?"

Helen was silent. "It can't be," she

said, at last. "Did you notice that forlorn young couple on the steamer? The man was a soldier in the Italian army; very poor, they told me, who had come over to America on leave to see if he could do anything to improve his fortunes. But he had failed, and they were returning. He was small and thin, and not good looking, but his wife had the sweetest face I ever saw. They were always together, and looked perfectly happy. I came across them one day in an out of the way corner. She was reading aloud to him. One hand held the book; the other was clasped in his, which was around her neck. If you could have seen her expression! In spite of all their poverty, there it was—the real thing—happiness. I shall never forget it. It was in her face."

"I did see it," said Mrs. Lindsay; "but I didn't think you had."

Helen's eyes filled with tears, and

when she looked at her friend, she was brushing away her own.

"How silly we are," she said. "Come, dearest, this is too late for an invalid. We must go to bed."

Chapter XVI.

II ELEN and Mrs. Lindsay spent their first days in the country, indoors, housed by a continued rain. The utter peace and quiet was reposing to Helen, although she grew no stronger; but Mrs. Lindsay became restless, and Helen insisted that she should take a holiday, not regretting the prospect of a few hours complete solitude. So on the first bright day Mrs. Lindsay went to Paris, and Helen was left alone. She wandered about the house at first, restlessly. Then she took a book to a hammock under the trees, but could not fix her attention on its pages; the words passed over the surface of her mind and left no trace. As afternoon came on she threw a scarf about her, and walking slowly in her light dress, she took her

way bareheaded through the orchard towards the river path. It was a radiant day after the warm rain, the orchards were in full blossom. Beyond the river, the meadows were tender with young green. The triumphant summons and echoes of the birds filled the branches, stirring with a fragrant breeze. It was the climax of spring. Helen stopped by a tree, whose name she did not know. It was flaming with deep pink blossoms. She lifted her face towards the sweeping branches, breathing deep of its luxuriant promises; her face showed transparently delicate against those blazing blossoms. Her hands trembled a little as she drew them towards her. She was no longer the brilliant beauty of a year ago, but this new loveliness was ethereal, rarer. With her light and swaying step, her white scarf floating from her shoulders, she moved among the blossoming trees like the returning spirit of the spring.

She had come to nature for repose

and cure, sometimes she found it, but not to-day. The appeal of all this springing beauty was intolerable. Her whole being thrilled to its command of happiness.

It seemed incredible that she alone must shut her heart against this singing harmony about her. To-day it was not resignation which these flowers and birds and trees brought to her, but a bitter revolt against the cruelty of life. "Do these birds reason," she asked herself; "and these flowers think? They live as they die, in unconscious obedience to the law which made them." As she walked there slowly among the trees, all her torture re-awoke with ten-fold bitterness.

"Ah, life! life!" she sighed, "must I always pass you by?"

Her feet faltered in their steps, she stopped a moment, realizing almost gladly how weak she had become. A breath of dampness blew up from the

river, she shivered, and drew her scarf about her shoulders, and for the first time, let her thoughts wander as they would. Physical exhaustion had at last loosened her unrelenting hold upon them. Now they flew to Aytoun. As she stood there trembling, her eyes dark with dreams, she clasped her hands together in a pose of willful quiet, while she imagined to herself their meeting. Already in her thoughts she had written to Aytoun; now she saw the vision of his coming. Her eyes dwelt upon the meadows beyond, bathed in the golden light of the declining sun, and through a mist of tears, she saw him stepping towards her over those fields of light, love in his eyes, the summer wind and sunshine in his hair. Once more she heard that unforgotten voice. "Thank God," she thought it said; "you have sent for me. It is not too late." She felt his touch, his kiss upon her mouth—such happiness!—was it of earth? She

felt herself sinking, sinking, her will following where her fancy led; her lips moved, she raised her hands to her eyes to shut out that inner vision, blinding, unescapable. "God help me," she whispered dumbly. Still that strange slipping, dissolving of her will! As she stood there, keenly conscious of this fatal drama in her mind, silent, motionless, the moments passing each one irreparable and momentous, she heard the slightest sound, the stirring of the leaves, the river's quiet murmur flowed through her brain.

Suddenly she heard a clear high voice:

"Nini printemps, dans ma mémoire,
C'est à toi la place d'honneur—
Sans bijoux ni manteau noir,
Tu as su trouver le bonheur!"

It sang.

She dropped her hands and listened. The sound seemed to draw nearer, and then around a bend in the stream came a boat filled with girls and men.

How near it was! she was too startled to move. She could see their faces plainly. A young man in a faded velvet jacket lounged in the bottom of the boat between two girls with yellow hair and painted cheeks.

Another man with a straight brimmed hat pushed back over his brown curls stood behind them, singing as he bent to his oar.

They were laughing and shouting in a merry confusion, which startled the stillness of the river:

"En route il faut rire,
Cupidon m'inspire!"

The boat was filled with the blossomed branches of the trees. Another man in the bow of the boat, had his arm around the girl who was singing. His back was turned to Helen, but she could see the girl, who was young with a strange dark face. Her hair was drawn down over her brow in a deep rippled mass. Her head was bare, her white curved throat

throbbed with her song. As they drew nearer, Helen could hear the words she sang:

" Par les sentiers remplis d' ivresse
Allons ensemble, à petits pas,
Je veux t' offrir, oh ! ma maitresse,
Le premier bouquet de lilas ! "

They were quite unconscious of her presence there, so near them. Suddenly the man in the bow turned his head, and looked full into Helen's eyes.

It was Philip. So he came to her.

One sharp and startled look of recognition from a face so changed, so old, so bitter, that Helen's stricken eyes scarce knew that it was he, and then he turned away, and gave no sign that he had seen her, taking up the refrain of the song, joining the others in their shouts and laughter.

Helen still stood watching them.

Je veux t' offrir, oh ! ma maitresse
Le premier bouquet de lilas—
Nini printemps!

She threw out her hands blindly about the trunk of the tree near which she stood. A great terror filled her eyes.

"What have I done," she whispered.
"What have I done?"

She stood there helpless, trembling, hearing only that repeated song.

Nini printemps, dans ma memoire
Nini printemps—Nini printemps—

She knew that it was over, the suffering, the longing, all the joy and pain. Rolled up like a scroll—part of the past—forever.

The song lingered in the air, the boat with its burden of flowers and laughter vanished like a vision—with it vanished her youth.

THE END.

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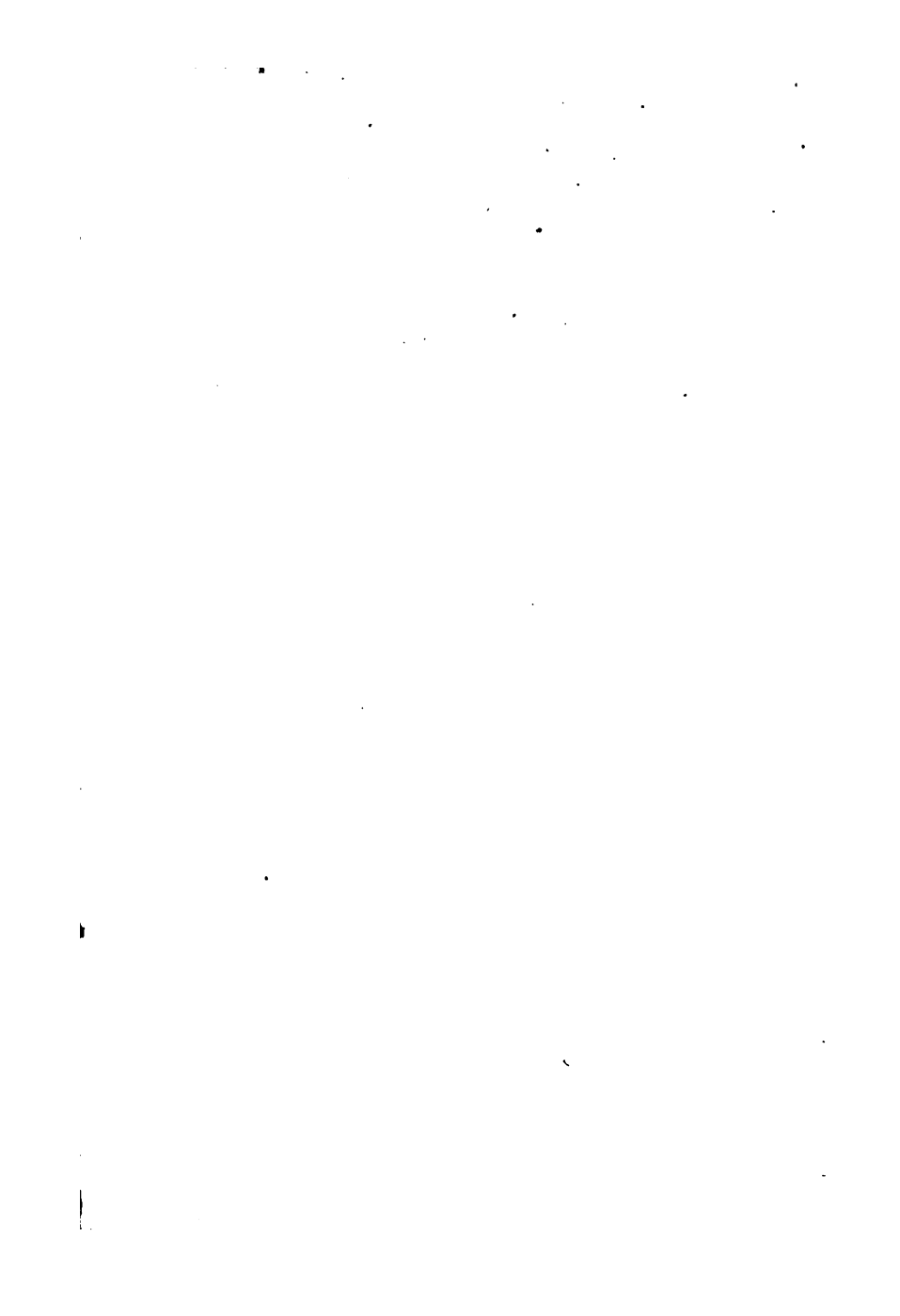
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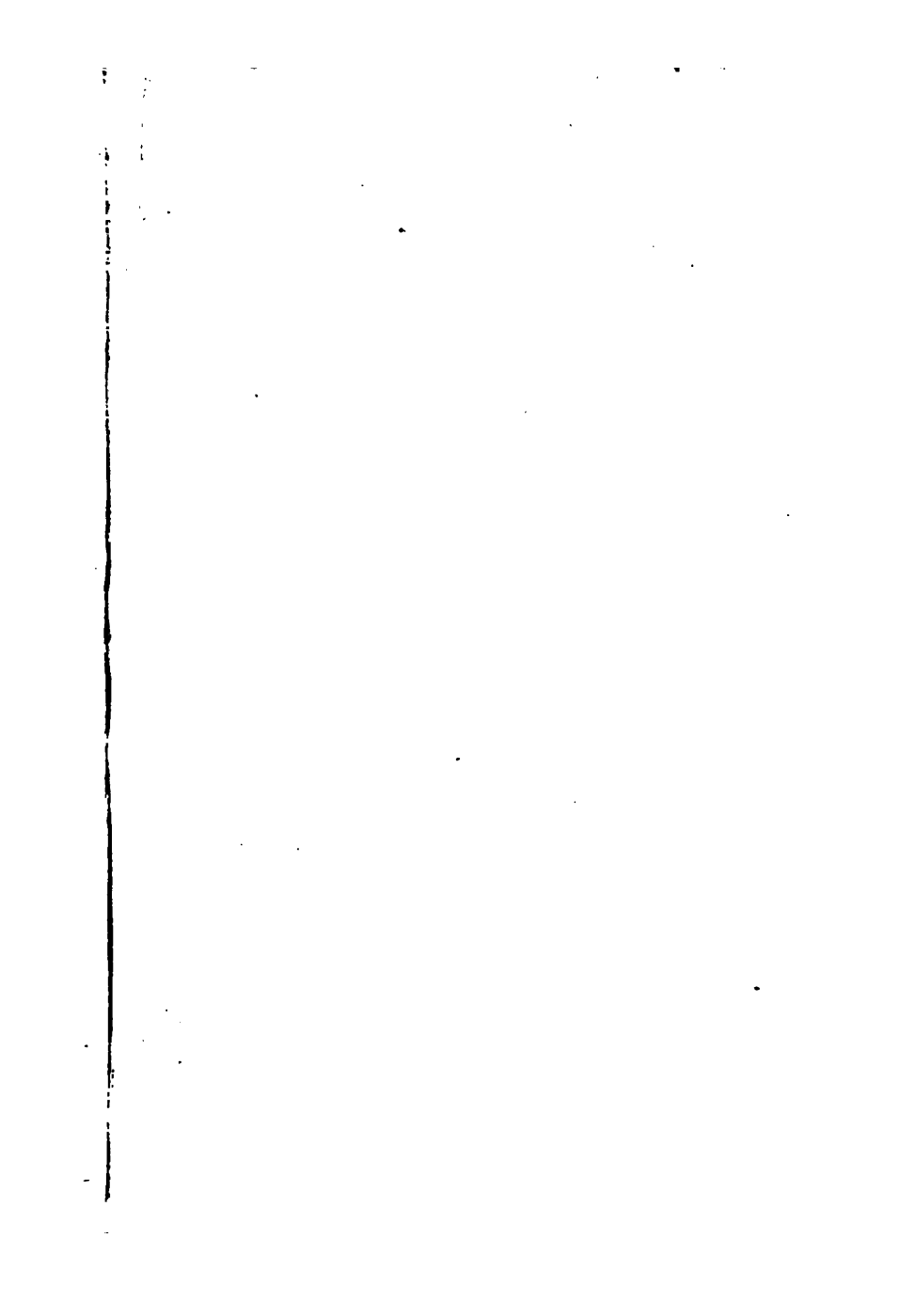
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